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The Australian Football League and the closet

Andrew Douglas
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The Australian Football League and the Closet

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Abstract

This thesis examines the complete absence of openly gay males from the ranks of the professional players in the Australian Football League (AFL). It seeks to explain this absence in the context of the modern gay rights movement, in contemporary Australian society. It compares and contrasts the effects of this movement on both the AFL and other mainstream Australian social institutions.

Over more than four decades, the gay rights movement has effected a number of social changes. These changes include both specific legal reforms and more general trends such as the increasing social visibility of gay men across a range of mainstream institutions including politics and the military. However, this trend is not consistent across all major institutions. It is far less evident in professional team sports, especially the major football codes of this country.

This research shows that the same trend is evident in the major football codes of countries such as Britain and the United States (US). However, what is unique to the AFL is that none of its current or former players has ever publicly declared his homosexuality in a biographical text or media interview.

Despite the absence of openly gay AFL players, this thesis accesses other significant sources such as the coming-out narratives of professional players in other football codes and of other athletes in Australia, Britain and the US. Furthermore, relevant research into homophobia among athletes is also presented. Given the absence of primary sources as well as the inability to access relevant subjects directly, this research is qualitative rather than quantitative. It is also speculative in that it seeks to explain a specific trend in professional sport in general and in the AFL in particular by outlining common trends.

A primary focus is the pattern of masculinity that prevails in men's sport, both amateur and professional. This pattern is examined in other exclusively or predominantly male institutions such as the military. Until the advent of gay liberation, this pattern of masculinity was depicted purely in heterosexual terms. This thesis explores the evolution of this dominant masculinity within the context of

modern Western society, specifically in terms of the Industrial Revolution and its effects on the sexual division of labour.

This predominant masculinity is also examined in relation to the mainstream media in various contexts. These include the reporting on both the public personas and the private lives of high-profile footballers in general and of AFL players in particular. A further context is how this reporting consolidates the elite status of high-profile, professional footballers and how a range of sexual indiscretions are portrayed in the mainstream media. The thesis also examines how the homoerotic aspect of AFL is portrayed within the media. Since some of this media coverage has been analysed by academic research, further insights are provided into aspects of misogyny and homophobia within the AFL. Both this media coverage and academic analysis allude to a culture within the AFL that tends to preclude a gay player from coming out.

This thesis explains the relationship among the factors— both within the sporting context and within broader society— that converge within the professional AFL to promote a particular pattern of masculinity. This pattern of masculinity continues to preclude the openly gay man among its ranks of professional players.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- i. incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- ii. contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis; or
- iii. contain any defamatory material.

Andrew Douglas

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List of Abbreviations

ADF	Australian Defence Force
AFL	Australian Football League
DADT	Don't Ask Don't Tell
NFL	National Football League
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
VFL	Victorian Football League
WAFL	West Australian Football League
WAGS	wives and girlfriends

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Whenever I enter my favourite bookshop, I cannot help but notice its prominent sports section: an entire display stand comprising four rows copiously filled with volumes on various teams and individuals who have gained popularity in their chosen sport. A cursory glance reveals the prominence of team sports such as football, rugby and soccer in the form of biographies and histories of various clubs. In terms of biography and compilations of statistics, there is much information on the major sporting codes of this country. With regard to Australian Rules football and the Australian Football League (AFL), many current and former professional players are the subjects of biography and there are histories of various AFL clubs.

In this sports section or in the Australian section, there is no sociological critique of AFL—in fact, there is no sociology section in this spacious bookstore. While the general reader may not expect such academic books in a general bookstore, there are comparatively few books on display that even critique—let alone criticise or condemn—this popular and exclusively male institution of contemporary Australian culture.

Occasionally, in the sports section, there are volumes about the more sensationalist and scandalous exploits of prominent AFL and Rugby League players with such titles as *The Bad Boys of Footy* (Webber, 2012) and *Scandalous: the Outrageous Behaviour of Sports Stars* (Stone, 2012). These compile indiscretions that have been widely reported in the popular media, ranging from substance abuse, infidelity, domestic violence, financial impropriety and, of course, (exclusively) heterosexual indiscretions. However, there are no biographies of any professional AFL players who identify as gay.

1.2 Lack of Positive Gay Role Models in Professional Team Sport

In the pre-gay liberation era, gay men had no positive role models or even stereotypes in the mainstream media. Gradually, this situation has changed over the past four decades in this and other countries. Gay men have emerged in various

positions of leadership and responsibility such as the federal and state parliaments, the High Court, and even athletics and professional sport. In contemporary society, AFL players are viewed as exemplars of a particular and popular masculinity. Due to the popularity of the game, its popular players are viewed, among other things, as positive role models for male youth. Unfortunately, for the gay youth with potential football talent, there are no role models in AFL and to date there never have been. When amateur country Victorian footballer Jason Ball came out in 2012 (Stark, 2012), he lamented that he had no gay role models in the sport he loved. This implies that other gay youth with football talent might be discouraged from realising their athletic potential.

Apart from the absence of a positive role models for gay youth, the lack of openly gay AFL players has a more general relevance to contemporary society. It suggests that this mainstream and exclusively male institution is somehow isolated from the changes evident in the rest of Australian society—changes pertaining to gay men and masculinity in general. This is significant given the comparative youth of players; most players begin their careers in their late teens or early twenties. Moreover, the majority of this cohort has been raised in contemporary society—a society that, among other things, has shown a marked change in tolerance and acceptance of the gay male over recent decades.

The lack of openly gay men in the current AFL suggests that it has a culture that is resistant to the positive social changes wrought by the gay movement. Equally serious is the fact that this resistance has not been remarked upon publicly until relatively recently: it was well into the twenty-first century before this absence was noted in the mainstream media, specifically when former AFL player Jason Akermanis (2010) publicly stated that gay players should remain in the closet. This thesis aims to explain, at least partially, the complete absence of openly gay males within the ranks of professional AFL players.

1.3 Genesis of the Current Research

In 2000 my play *Grand Final* (Douglas, 2000) was included as part of the events for the 2000 WA Gay and Lesbian Pride Festival. As the title suggests, it was about football, specifically about a popular AFL player and the issues he faces in trying to pursue his sporting career while simultaneously maintaining an intimate

relationship with another man. Although only one of many events of that year's festival, it was well attended and ran for almost two weeks at two different venues. It received no mainstream publicity and was advertised only in alternate media such as the festival guide (McGuren & Bluett, 2000). A number of factors contributed to its success, including its rather novel subject matter. It was and remains one of the comparatively few works of fiction to link the themes of male homosexuality with popular team sports in the form of football. At the time and perhaps to this day, conventional wisdom does not tend to associate male homosexuality with exclusively male pursuits, especially with the holy grail of Australian sport, the AFL.

The social "incompatibility" of the two phenomena was reflected in various ways. For example, the play's director Jamie Cant contacted the management of the two AFL teams in Western Australia (WA), Westcoast Eagles and Fremantle Dockers, as well as the local West Australian Football League (WAFL) to invite them to the premiere of the play. Significantly, none attended or even replied to his email. It was subsequently speculated as reported by Abbie (2000) that attendance at such an event might have given credence to the theme of the play. It seems that the state's football hierarchy either did not feel comfortable with the work's theme or did not wish to be associated with a festival celebrating homosexuality in modern society. Inevitably, this play generated talk and speculation that it was based on an actual player and that he was about to announce his homosexuality. Unfortunately, despite the time that has elapsed since the play's premiere in 2000, homosexuality remains the last "taboo" for AFL players, both past and present.

The non-attendance of the WA football hierarchy at a Gay and Lesbian Pride event was and is symptomatic of a broader trend in modern society, which tends to view professional team sports and male homosexuality as two mutually exclusive categories. This perceived disparity forms the central theme of the play, namely the difficulty such a sportsperson would have in coming out of the closet. Indeed, to stress this difficulty, the companion of the footballer character in the play is a gay rights activist. The play highlights that despite many decades of gay activism, its effects have not been uniform across all contemporary social institutions: while there is generally greater acceptance and social visibility of gay men, this trend is not as evident in professional team sport, specifically this country's popular football codes.

For me, this play was the culmination of over 20 years of involvement in gay activism: it reflected how much had been achieved in terms of gay rights and visibility as well as what still had to be accomplished in contemporary society. Becoming a gay activist meant having access to and being part of a gay subculture, which was still largely invisible to large segments of society.

1.4 Aim

The aim of this research is to explore the complete absence of openly gay men within a major institution of contemporary Australian society, namely the professional player ranks of the AFL. It is only comparatively recently that this absence has received any attention in the mainstream media. In examining this issue, it is hoped that some explanation for this gap in our culture might also emerge.

This thesis seeks to identify possible factors that preclude gay players from being open about their sexuality within the AFL. The absence of gay players seems to go against prevailing social trends of modern society where gay men are increasingly tolerated and accepted across a range of social institutions, such as their significant leadership roles within politics and the judiciary.

As there does not appear to be significant academic research on this topic, this thesis draws from a range of sources, including biographical and autobiographical literature, articles from mainstream newspapers and magazines, and articles from major gay magazines such as the Australian *DNA* and the British *Gay Times*. The biographical literature will include the coming-out narratives of sportsmen from other professional football codes and other professional sports within Australia and internationally.

The role of the media is also significant, as many AFL star players have attained celebrity status and aspects of not only their professional careers but also their private lives are often covered in the tabloid press. While these media do not avoid reporting the controversial aspects of these players' lives—just as they would of other public figures such as politicians or popular screen actors—they stop short of mentioning anything that might hint at homosexuality. To date, no AFL player has ever been forcibly outed by the media. For some undeclared reason, AFL players are exempt from this particular form of media exposure. To explain why no AFL player has as yet come out of the closet, the media's portrayal of masculinity in high-profile

team sports may be significant.

This research attempts to identify possible factors that appear to preclude openly gay players within the AFL by examining a range of contemporary social institutions such as organised professional sport and the mainstream media, as well as more abstract constructs such as masculinity and homophobia. It examines these phenomena within not only contemporary Western society but also the historical context of post-industrial society.

Over the past four decades, the rise of the gay rights movement has made gay men more visible in a range of prominent Australian institutions. However, there appears to be one notable exception: professional AFL players. What is remarkable is not only the complete absence of any openly gay current players in the AFL but also the fact that no former players have ever publicly come out. Given the long history of the game and the large number of teams, the number of former players would easily run into several thousands. It is unusual that in over a century of the history of the AFL, no professional player has ever declared his homosexuality or been outed by others. While current players may be reluctant for various reasons to come out, none as yet has ever seen it necessary to do so from the comparative security of retirement. Still more unusual is the fact that throughout the game's history, not one of its players has ever been posthumously outed. This is not all that surprising, given that the mainstream media took no interest in the question until relatively recently.

1.5 Research Question

The primary question the thesis addresses is: What are the factors that preclude contemporary AFL footballers from coming out publicly and declaring their homosexuality?

In order to investigate this issue, it is necessary to examine it from various but related contexts:

1. Patterns of Masculinity in Contemporary Sport
 - a. What are the types of masculine identity in contemporary team sports?
 - b. How have these masculine identities evolved, and do they reflect similar identities in other male-dominated institutions?
 - c. How do these patterns differ from other emerging patterns of masculinity in contemporary society?

2. Media Representations

- a. How does the mass media portray professional sportsmen, specifically AFL players?
- b. How does the mass media deal with the salacious and more controversial aspects of AFL players' lives?
- c. Are there any discernible trends in the media representations of these more controversial aspects of professional sports?

1.6 Significance of this Study

The significance of this study lies in critically examining a hitherto largely ignored aspect of a major institution of Australian popular culture, namely that no current or former AFL player has ever chosen to come out as gay.

In the field of sport generally, there has been significant change with regard to openly gay men: athletes from other team sporting codes such as Rugby League and even Olympic athletes such as Mathew Mitcham have come out in recent years. However, there is no equivalent among any current or former AFL players, and this could explain why there does not appear to have been much academic research on homosexuality in this major Australian sporting institution.

This study aims to explore why there are no openly gay AFL players by identifying factors within both the institution of AFL and contemporary Australian society in general. Given that the subjects—homosexual AFL players—cannot be easily accessed, this study can only present some logical speculations rather than definitive facts. This study seeks not only to draw attention to the imperfect state of knowledge concerning this subject but also to provide further discussion and perhaps stimulate further research on why gay men in this professional football code choose to conceal their sexuality.

1.7 Background to the Study

It was not until almost the middle of the last century that any systematic research on the sexual activity of adult males took place. Through large-scale studies such as that of Alfred Kinsey (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948)—which included thousands of participants—consistent patterns of sexual behaviour began to emerge. Kinsey's (1948) pioneering study revealed the extent of homosexual acts and orientation in the general population. Significantly, it revealed that such acts were

more common than was generally accepted (cited in Bullough, 1979; Gathorne-Hardy, 2005).

When dealing with social constructs such as masculinity or homophobia or the acceptance of homosexuality, it can be very difficult to identify or pinpoint any discernible changes. While there appears to be comparatively little change within some institutions such as the AFL, it is possible to discern significant changes in the rest of society as reflected by legal reforms such as decriminalisation and the greater acceptance of social policies such as equal opportunity to include gay individuals. Such social changes occur gradually, often over several years or even decades. The generational change effected by four decades of gay liberation is indicative of this gradual process. In addition, it is not generally possible to clearly delineate the stages of such change. Often it is a matter of trends that emerge over an extended period of time, which may not always be consistent. In terms of the acceptance of homosexuality in contemporary Australia, observable changes are not always uniform across all institutions: they occur at different rates in different contexts (Altman, 2013). Therefore, any specific research into such a topic is likely to reflect a variety of information from which some consistent trends may emerge.

1.7.1 Homosexuality as deviance and pathology.

Until the 1960s, negative attitudes to homosexuality were so prevalent that an objective, systematic study of gay men was rarely attempted. Lewes (1988) has shown that the psychiatric profession of the United States (US) in the 1950s was so affected by this negative bias that it distorted the majority of its findings. Psychiatrists and psychoanalysts based their practice and research on highly unrepresentative data: the bulk of their theoretical findings were based on the inmates of prisons and psychiatric facilities and on relatively small research samples. The majority of these experts did not allow for the possibility that well-adjusted gay men existed, namely ones who did not become the residents of prisons or psychiatric hospitals. Such assumptions inevitably skewed all their findings towards a negative stereotype, which complemented the prevailing attitudes of the period.

The homophobic medical bias of this period is a significant example of how values and attitudes have altered over the past few decades. The pervasive values of the 1950s that were held to be based on scientific evidence have now been discredited, and very few psychiatric or medical practitioners still advocate them

(Isay, 1989; Lewes, 1988). This change in medical categorisation away from psychiatric pathology is merely one example of how contemporary Western society in general is no longer as proscriptive or intolerant of homosexuality.

Since my research is concerned with the issue of openly gay men, it inevitably examines definitions of masculinity, whether homosexuality forms part of these definitions, and to what extent it does so. It is only comparatively recently that gay men have become socially visible in significantly large numbers. Prior to this increased visibility, conventional definitions of masculinity often excluded the homosexual male. These definitions of masculinity, although constantly changing, clearly have a significant effect on the members of professional team sports, such as AFL players. A summary of these definitions and their role in professional sport will set some parameters for this research.

1.7.2 Homosexuality and Sport in Modern Society.

Similarly an examination of the prominent role sport plays in contemporary society is essential, including the historical context within which organised team sports evolved. This would include team sports in general and league football in particular. For example, the critical sociological analysis of the role of sport in modern society by authors such as Anderson (2010) provides a relevant backdrop to examine the relationship between sport and significant issues such as changing gender roles and sexual stereotypes. In this context, the importance of AFL as a significant social institution cannot be overlooked (Blainey, 2003). However, there does not appear to be any detailed, academic critique of the AFL in the context of sexual minorities to date. In fact, Wellard (2003) found relatively few researchers focused on issues of gender and sexuality in sport. It is only during the past two decades that this issue has been examined in any detail, albeit by comparatively few researchers such as Pronger (1990) and Anderson (2005a, 2010).

In the absence of more specific research, one might ask whether and to what extent the findings of such authors could be applied to the AFL. Popular AFL players are frequently the subject of mainstream media attention, which can extend beyond their sporting achievements to various aspects of their private lives. There may be a discernible consistency in the way these players and their actions are presented in the mainstream media. This consistency may, in turn, help explain the complete absence of openly gay professional AFL players. No examination of this topic can avoid

mention of the broader social phenomena such as contemporary social constructs of masculinity, which might contribute, both directly and indirectly, to this complete absence.

1.8 Theoretical Perspective: Hegemonic Masculinity

My theoretical perspective is that a specific form of masculinity predominates in professional team sports such as AFL. Furthermore, this form of masculinity is both socially and psychologically incongruous with the idea of openly homosexual men. It would seem that an openly gay AFL player does not “fit” with the prescribed definitions of conventional masculinity in modern society. The narrow, traditional concepts of masculinity and manhood still prevail within this exclusively male bastion of competitive sport. It would appear that this institution of our popular culture views the masculinity of its professional players primarily in terms of heterosexuality. The issue to be explored in this thesis is whether a traditional binary of opposites of male/female, heterosexual/homosexual still dominates and is seen as always mutually exclusive.

Given this situation, theories of masculinity—particularly hegemonic masculinity—may be more effective in analysing the absence of the openly gay man in the ranks of the AFL. While Connell (2005), Anderson (2010) and Buchbinder (2013) acknowledge that there are many different patterns of masculinity in modern society, they agree that there is one pattern that sits at the apex of this hierarchy—what they term “hegemonic masculinity”, which embodies all the socially desirable traits of this particular gender term. This pattern of masculinity holds a dominant position in society and supports collective male privilege. It may be viewed as what constitutes a “real” man in our society, which is reflected in the heroes of our popular culture, such as elite athletes and decorated military personnel. Such men are considered exemplars of a masculinity to which others aspire or seek to imitate. Among its more overt traits are physical strength and endurance, competitiveness and aggression, as well as power and control over others. Its more covert aspects include an ability to endure emotional and physical stress, as well as leadership, both within the public sphere of their chosen field and the private sphere of their families. This theory of masculinity tends to stress the differences between the genders: men are the active participants in social interaction, while women tend to be the passive recipients. Dominance and action are among the defining traits extending to all

aspects of the male including his sexuality.

This concept of hegemonic masculinity is useful to this study as it tends to exclude non-heterosexual identity. In fact, Anderson (2005a) argues convincingly that the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity with its emphasis on male dominance and control is a form of sociological oppression of women and minorities such as gay men. The general exclusion of the gay male from the theoretical paradigm of hegemonic masculinity helps explain the under-representation of openly gay males in predominantly male institutions such as professional team sports.

By necessity, this research deals with issues of gender, masculinity and sexuality, which authors such as Buchbinder (2013), Anderson (2010) and J. Butler (1990) have shown to be dynamic social constructs. These phenomena are subjectively and socially interpreted, and the interpretations change over time within a given society (J. Butler, 1993). These dynamic and subjective social phenomena lend themselves to a methodology that acknowledges a diversity of interpretations and experience as equally valid. This is valid in the field of gender and sexuality, not only because individuals may define themselves differently from more conventional stereotypes but also because sexuality for some individuals is not “fixed”: a person’s sexual orientation and sexual behaviour can alter in the course of their lifetime. These concepts mirror aspects of qualitative research in that they are not value-free but subjective constructs, relying on individual interpretations rather than one supposedly objective and universal standard.

1.9 Methodology

Given the absence of openly gay professional AFL players, a quantitative methodology—sampling and testing statistics of the target population—is not possible. Conversely, a qualitative approach is more flexible and eclectic in that it may use a variety of data sources (Sarantakos, 2005). This is more appropriate for this study, as the topic is not a concrete, measurable commodity but an abstract concept such as a social phenomenon. Sarantakos (2005) offers a broader interpretation of qualitative methodology that is relevant to this study, stating it “is diverse, pluralistic and in some cases even ridden with internal contradictions” (p. 36). He further elaborates that such a methodology is based on the premise that “reality” is not an objective, unitary phenomenon but a subjective, multifaceted

construct. In qualitative methodology, there is no single “correct” reality; different individuals and groups interpret their social experience in different ways. In this study, various forms of literature—including academic research, articles from mainstream newspapers, magazines and gay publications, and biographical data—on relevant topics are critically examined in relation to the stated research questions. The main methods used include case studies, textual analysis, coming out narratives and media analysis.

1.9.1 Case studies.

The case study is used extensively throughout empirical research as both a descriptive and analytic tool. It has a wide application in formal research since the subject matter of a “case” can vary greatly: for example, it can be a person, a social institution, a cultural practice or any observable phenomenon such as events reported in the media (Grix, 2004). Given its scope and extensive use in formal research, there may not be any one conclusive definition of the case study (Evans, 1997; Yin, 2003). Nevertheless, it is still possible to identify some of its salient features.

Yin (2003) makes a number of points regarding the case-study approach which are relevant to this research: it is an empirical enquiry into a contemporary phenomenon within its immediate social context. Significantly, he adds that often the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident and that various sources of evidence are used. Thus, the case-study approach tends to be eclectic by its very nature in that it uses various sources to obtain data.

The case-study approach provides a valid research strategy by narrowing the focus to a particular field in a particular social context. As Grix (2004) explains, the scope of an individual case study can be highly specific “The subject of such a case could be anything from an individual, a town, a group or political party, a region or community, a specific process, decision or policy, and so on” (p. 51).

Grix (2004) elaborates that the case study is not synonymous with any specific research method and that there is no definitive case-study model as such. Yin (2003) describes a number of designs and methods pertaining to the case study for academic research. Similarly, Weerakkody (2009) and Sarantakos (2005) outline various stages in the presentation of case studies, such as sampling, coding and analysing data. The sampling in this study will include the collection of biographical

data, media articles and peer-reviewed journal articles. The comparatively small number of coming-out narratives from other major football codes (e.g. US gridiron and British soccer) implies these few cases might not be a representative sample.

Mills, Durepos and Wiebe (2009) describe “abduction” as a valid tool in the interpretation of a case study. Abduction relies on imaginative efforts and practical reasoning to account for seemingly unusual or unexpected phenomena. For example, an unusual or surprising fact is observed, “X”. From this, the researcher speculates that if “Y” were true then “X” would follow as a logical consequence. In the context of this research, a general observation is the fact that gay men are coming out in a range of team and individual sports today. The unusual “X” phenomenon is that this has not occurred within the AFL. Using the process of abduction to speculate on why this is so might lead to some consistent and logical theoretical speculations.

These case studies will include a textual analysis of how issues pertaining to sexuality are portrayed in the media in the context of high-profile team sportsmen and an examination of how other misdemeanours by such sportsmen are treated in the media as well as academic research into these misdemeanours.

1.9.2 Textual analysis.

Textual analysis is a methodology that involves the gathering of information about how human beings make sense of the world (McKee, 2003). A text may be anything that can be interpreted within a particular social context, namely a specific culture at a particular period. A text can refer to any printed matter, such as that from mainstream media (i.e. the tabloid press) or alternate subcultures such as the gay press. It can encompass fictional works such as novels or plays and non-fiction works such as biographies, histories and peer-reviewed academic research. Furthermore, it is not limited to written or printed matter but can include music, films and television programmes (Sarantakos, 2005; Weerakkody, 2009).

This research draws from a textual analysis of secondary sources relevant to the topic, including biographical studies. As there are parallels with major football codes in other Western nations, it is evident that the absence of openly gay men is not an isolated phenomenon but a common aspect of high-profile team sports in modern society. Therefore, any relevant examples of coming out in these contexts will have implications for the Australian context. Studies and biographical data of

gay athletes from other professional sports are also used to augment this thesis.

Gay athletes are an important testimony that gay males are and always have been part of elite sports, although until 30 years ago they were completely invisible. Their experience also offers insights into why so few choose to follow their example, even after retirement from competitive sport. Moreover, gay athletes' experience can also reflect the broader social change in homophobia over several decades. For example, in the case of US gridiron football, there are coming-out narratives from the 1970s (Dave Kopay) to the present decade (Alan Gendreau).

1.9.3 Coming-out narratives.

One of the sources I examine through textual analysis is "coming-out narratives", which cover a range of experience from the amateur to the professional sportsman. The personal experiences of non-professional sportspeople are relevant sources because they provide avenues of comparison and contrast, and help identify significant trends in the sporting experience of the gay male (Anderson, 2005a; Symons, Sbaraglia, Hillier, & Mitchell, 2010; Woog, 1998, 2002). Thus, they will help reveal any significant patterns among these coming-out narratives.

With successive generations, gay men are exposed to an ever-increasing variety of role models and stereotypes, some of which are affirmations of the gay experience in that many gay men would seek to emulate or identify with them. For example, the few American gridiron footballers to come out include Dave Kopay in 1975 (Kopay & Young, 2001), who is from a Croatian background; the African-American Roy Simmons in 1992 (Simmons & Dimarco, 2006); the Samoan Esera Tuaolo in 2002 (Tuaolo & Rosengren, 2006); and Kwame Harris, who is from a Jamaican background, in 2013 (Melvin, 2013). Although a very small sample, it suggests that high-profile gay athletes reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of mainstream society. By implication, their presence provides affirming role models for the gay males of their respective racial and ethnic groups. Simultaneously, they challenge traditional, negative stereotypes of gay males as weak and effeminate.

Coming-out narratives form a significant foundation of this case study, especially when there is significant biographical and autobiographical material pertaining to a particular individual. This thesis found that there is a trend in recent years for a sportsman to make an announcement of his coming out in the popular

media. Though there may be little else in the form of official documentation, the coverage in mainstream newspapers, which are part of the public realm, lends itself to textual analysis. For example, when professional US basketball player Jason Collins came out in April 2013, there was significant coverage in the mainstream media (Williams, 2013; Zeigler, 2013), which was largely limited to his act of coming out and to support from other professional sportsmen and even the US President (Agence-France-Presse, 2013). As yet, there is little biographical data about Collins, but there is sufficient media commentary for a textual analysis of his act of coming out.

An earlier example of public disclosure reflects the same aspects. In the case of Justin Fashanu (the first and as yet only professional British soccer player to come out), his official biography did not appear until over a decade following his death (Read, 2012). However, there was notable comment in the media following his coming out in 1990 and subsequent suicide eight years later (Kernaghan, 1998).

Whenever a prominent man comes out in a public forum, there is generally some media analysis or comment (as in the case of professional US basketball player Jason Collins). Such media coverage may form part of their coming-out narrative, at least initially, and can be viewed both in the context of textual analysis and as a case study.

A further significant factor for this research has been the development of amateur sporting teams and clubs specifically for gay individuals, such as soccer and rugby teams in Australia and Britain. These clubs provide a forum where the amateur gay sportsman can come out. While there do not appear to be many Australian studies on this comparatively new phenomenon (Symons, Sbaraglia, Hillier, & Mitchell, 2010; "Whose team are you on?," 2006), there are some from other countries including Britain (Jones & McCarthy, 2010; Price & Parker, 2003). These studies highlight that such clubs provide the acceptance lacking in mainstream sporting teams and clubs comprising mostly heterosexual men. These amateur gay teams provide a positive environment of acceptance and camaraderie, which is not otherwise possible for gay men wishing to pursue their amateur sporting interests.

1.9.4 Media analysis.

The topic of gay professional athletes has not been discussed in the

mainstream media until relatively recently. In fact, male homosexuality has hardly ever been subject to media coverage in connection with professional football until the past few years. A significant turning point occurred in 2010 when former AFL player Jason Akermanis (2010) made his infamous remarks concerning gay players remaining in the closet. Up to this point, there had not been any consistent or serious discussion in the mainstream media on the issue of openly gay players. In an era when the media has no hesitation in outing public figures such as politicians or pop stars, it has yet to out any AFL player. In this sense, the AFL enjoys a singular “immunity” from the thirst for tabloid scoops and salacious headlines.

One wonders whether this is the result of a tacit understanding or something approaching an official, if unstated, media policy among tabloid journalists. It may not be possible to provide any definitive conclusions or answers to such a question. However, it is possible to discern at least some clear trends. My media analysis reveals that the subject of homosexuality among professional AFL players tends to be avoided; while the mainstream media does not hesitate to cover alleged indiscretions such as marital infidelity, group sex or alleged sexual assault, it does not report allegations of homosexuality pertaining to particular players. This pattern of non-reporting appears to be a long-standing trend (see Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion). Therefore, the popular media and its patterns of reporting are a further potential case study relevant to the topic. The fact that gay participation in sport is the topic of reports such as *Come Out to Play* (Symons et al., 2010) and some recent newspaper articles (Walsh, 2010, 2012) is a sign of societal change. Where once such a topic was avoided altogether, it has now been given some serious coverage in the mainstream press (Stark, 2012, 2013b, 2013c).

Since 2010, media attention has been drawn, even if momentarily, to the reality that homosexual men are part of league football by the remarks of former players such as Jason Akermanis and aspiring players such as Jason Ball (see Chapter 6). This media coverage has further highlighted the invisibility of openly gay men in the mainstream media and general public awareness. Coverage in the popular press, such as *The Australian*, *The Age*, *The West Australian* and *The Herald Sun*, provide a primary source for investigation. The topic has also been given some coverage on news bulletins and television programmes such as *The Footy Show*, as well as in the gay press (e.g. *DNA*).

Inevitably, the role of the mass media in such a phenomenon must be examined. In an era where the indiscretions of public figures are frequent tabloid fodder, the media regularly focuses on football and other sporting figures. The coverage in recent years of the indiscretions of players such as Ben Cousins and Brendan Fevola are relevant examples (Emery, 2010; C Wilson, 2010). This tabloid coverage has been augmented by the publication of their autobiographies (Cousins, 2010; Fevola, 2012). In these instances, the topics of substance abuse and sexual assault are examined as part of the culture of the major Australian football codes, but any discussion of sexual misdemeanours is exclusively within the context of heterosexuality. In fact, such tabloid scandals have been so widely reported that, in some instances, they themselves have become the subject of academic research (Seear & Fraser, 2010; Waterhouse-Watson, 2009)

1.10 Limitations of the Study

There are clear limitations in any study where the target group or subject cannot be directly observed or accessed. Moreover, this problem is exacerbated if there are no preceding studies on a particular topic. To date, I have been unable to find any academic studies on homosexual AFL players. As there has never been an openly gay player in the professional AFL, there are no coming-out narratives to be studied or even cited. Therefore, there can be no direct observation of the proposed subject and no quantitative analysis of statistical trends. Instead, there can only be speculation as to likely factors contributing to this trend of non-disclosure. This research attempts to draw parallels and logical assumptions based on any trends that may be discerned in the mainstream media and the coming-out narratives of other professional sportsmen, as well as academic research in peer-reviewed journals on such topics as homophobia within sporting institutions. It cannot be conclusive or definitive: in posing a question that does not seem to have been studied previously, there is no guarantee of any “correct” answers (Stark, 2012).

1.11 Chapter Outlines

The remainder of this thesis is organised as follows.

Chapter 2 presents the salient aspects of the modern gay rights movement and the changes it has wrought in little over four decades. This is done within the context of the movement’s effects on mainstream perceptions of sexuality and gender. The

distinct and evolving trends of greater social acceptance and visibility are identified within the context of modern Western society.

Chapter 3 examines the changing patterns of masculinity within our culture and its implications for gay men. It covers the role of organised sport in post-industrial Western society, as well as the relatively new phenomenon of queer theory and its historical antecedents.

Chapter 4 explores the changing patterns and forms of masculinity in relation to exclusively or predominantly male institutions such as professional football and the military and with reference to recent scandals in the media pertaining to misogyny and homophobia. It also includes the changes wrought on official policy by the modern gay rights movement, namely the inclusion of openly gay personnel within the military.

Chapter 5 looks at professional football and the media portrayal of its more popular participants. The homoerotic aspects of this portrayal and the hero status of popular players are also examined. Recent controversial and salacious aspects of this portrayal are also discussed in case studies of specific players such as Brendan Fevola and Jason Akermanis.

Chapter 6 investigates recent controversies in the mainstream media in relation to the potential coming out of gay AFL players. Specifically, it covers events since 2010 and reactions from the AFL hierarchy and the mainstream media to issues of gay players and of combating homophobia within the AFL. Finally, it speculates on the likely reasons for the total absence of openly gay males within the AFL context and explores possible factors that may preclude such males from coming out by focusing on unique aspects of AFL culture.

Chapter 7 draws together the various aspects of the analysis and speculations presented in the preceding chapters. It identifies the points of convergence and divergence of the information presented as well as looking at avenues for possible future research.

Chapter 2: Gay Rights are Human Rights

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the origins of the modern gay rights movement and its cumulative effects on modern society. While this movement has always included gay women, this study will focus on the gay male experience as it is concerned with the exclusively male bastion of professional AFL players. The effects of the movement are both overt (in the sense of the increased social visibility of gay men) and covert (in the sense of more subtle social changes across a range of institutions, such as the corresponding research and information on the gay experience). This movement has resulted in significant social change as gay rights have been extended in areas such as equal opportunity. In over four decades since the advent of gay liberation, gay individuals have gradually moved from being a marginalised group as their human rights are progressively being acknowledged.

The aim of this chapter is to show that while the gay movement has achieved much in terms of legal rights and social visibility, these gains have not been consistent across all social institutions such as the exclusively male organisations of professional team sports. In the second decade of this century, it appears that achievements such as increased social visibility have not reached the AFL.

This chapter begins by describing the effects of the modern gay rights movement on modern society, including that of Australia. It will detail some of the significant changes this movement has brought about. Overall, it will illustrate that gay men have become increasingly visible across a range of social institutions, and their contributions in previous eras are gradually being uncovered through various historical studies. Finally it will discuss this increased visibility in the context of contemporary professional sport.

2.2 Gay History

One of my interests as a gay rights activist was to explore gay history and the contributions of gays to contemporary Western culture. It soon became apparent that just as with contemporary Western society, the achievements of gays of earlier

periods were largely hidden and ignored, and required some persistent research to uncover. Consulting anthologies of prominent gay individuals and their achievements (Aldrich & Wotherspoon, 2001; Stern, 2009), it emerged that gay men seemed to be “overrepresented” in certain fields while conspicuously absent in others. For example, they abound in the performing arts (as singers, actors and ballet dancers) but are hardly visible in the arena of professional sport. Since I began this research over 30 years ago, this situation has altered only marginally, despite the significant gains made by the gay rights movement.

To someone born after 1970, for example, it is difficult to describe the situation that once existed for sexual minorities such as gay men in society. While it might be naive to assume that they have achieved full equality, they have definitely moved towards greater acceptance and won significant rights such as the decriminalisation of homosexual acts and equal opportunity protection (Altman, 2013). Many gains have been made, both in terms of legal reforms and social visibility through internationally recognised forums such as Gay Pride. Both a cause and an effect of this progress has been the increasing visibility of gay men across a range of institutions such as politics, law and education. This significant change makes the complete invisibility of gays within the AFL all the more unusual.

Equally intriguing is the comparative lack of academic research on the complete absence of openly gay males within the professional ranks of this major institution of Australian popular culture. While much has been written on masculinity in the context of organised sport and on gay issues in recent years, there appears to be little overlap between the two topics. For example, when consulting certain works specifically on masculinity (Buchbinder, 2013; Connell, 1995) or queer theory (Yep, Lovaas, & Elia, 2003), there is comparatively little space, if any, devoted to male team sports or even sport in general, and AFL does not appear to be even mentioned. As yet, there does not appear to have been any systematic attempt to investigate current or former AFL players in the context of homosexuality. Indeed, there is scant reference to the topic in peer-reviewed journal articles I consulted. In the course of this research, I have found only one article where this absence was specifically alluded to (Mewett & Toffoletti, 2008). Significantly, this article was in the context of feminist critique and not of specifically gay activism.

2.3 Post Gay Liberation Research

The lack of critical investigation is all the more intriguing given the extent of research in other fields pertaining to various aspects of the gay experience and its subcultures since the rise of modern gay liberation. For example, Chauncey (1995) has written a detailed study of the male gay subculture in New York city from the 1890s to the 1940s, Humphreys (2008) has written extensively on the beat culture of gay men during the 1970s (i.e. their anonymous sexual encounters in public places), and Bennemann (2006) has examined similar themes from colonial America.

Furthermore, certain exclusively male institutions in Western society have been studied, with themes as diverse as pirates (Turley, 1999; see Fig. 1) and cowboys (Packard, 2006; see Fig. 2).

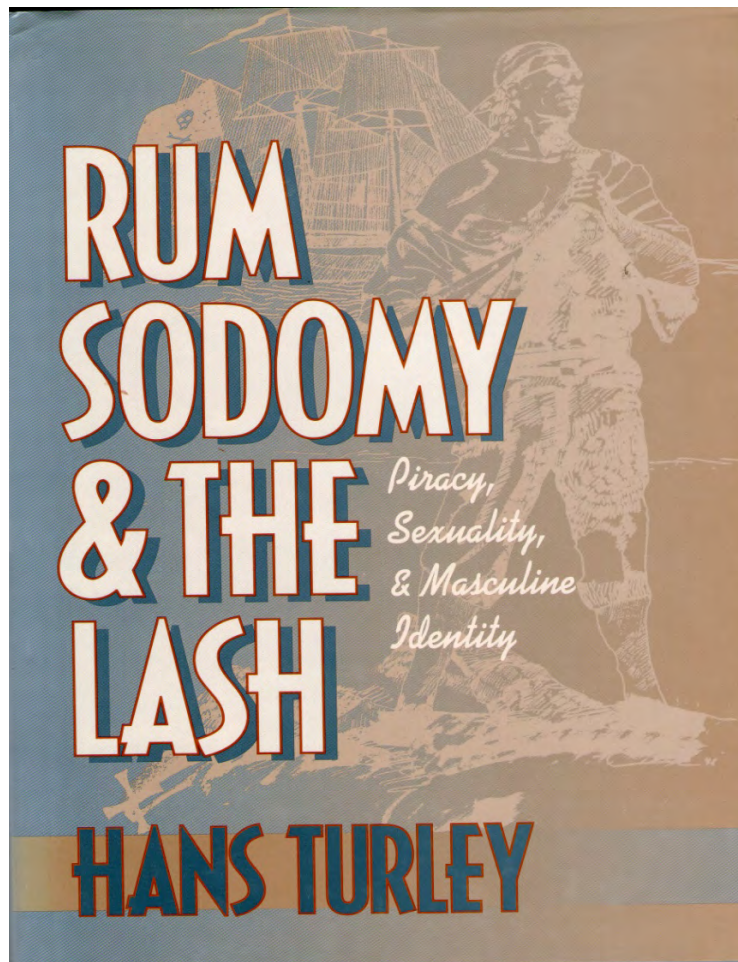


Figure 1: Cover of Turley's (1999) book, *Rum, Sodomy and the Lash*.

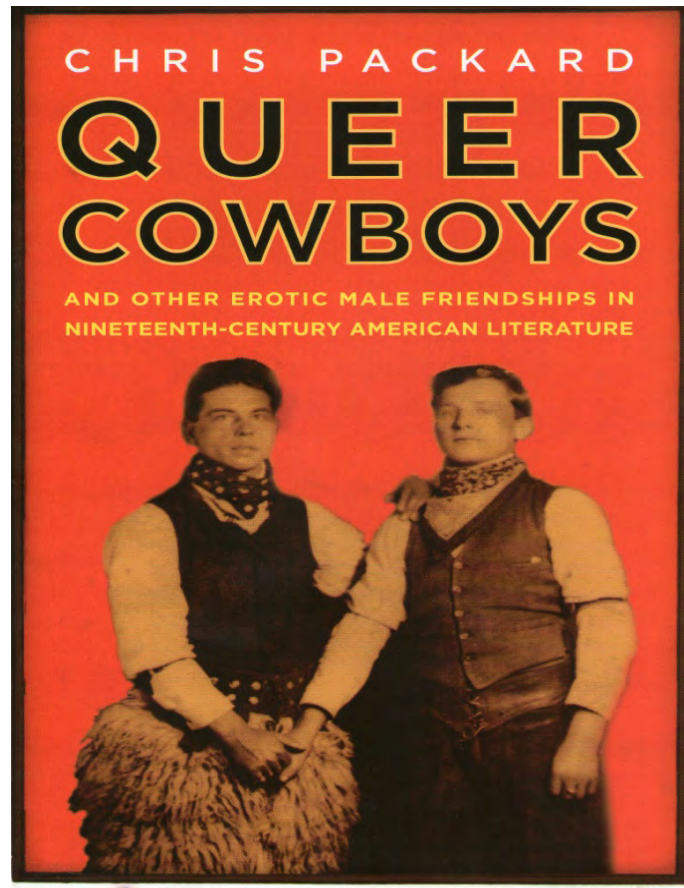


Figure 2: Cover of Packard's (2006) book, *Queer Cowboys*.

For example, in *Rum, Sodomy and the Lash*, Turley (1999) explores the pirate culture from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the context of the transgressive masculinity that has come to be associated with it. Relying on sources such as court documents and biographical data, he illustrates that the homosocial environment of piracy held appeal for same-sex attracted men and that homosexual acts were not isolated or rare events within this culture. In this sense, pirates were outlaws not only in a legal and economic sense but also in terms of sexual “deviance” as defined by the society of that period.

In *Queer Cowboys*, Packard (2006) examines the “wild west” of nineteenth-century North America in the context of its social groupings such as those of cowboys, miners and pioneers, who generally tended to exclude women in its many frontier settlements. He explores the literature, both fiction and non-fiction, of the period, to shed light on sectors of that society where homoeroticism and close male bonding were commonplace.

Research has extended to earlier historical epochs, such as the historian John Boswell's (Boswell, 1980, 1995) extensive studies of the medieval period. Not only do such works cover a vast range of topics, the level of scholarship and research is often impressive. Moreover, they cover institutions renowned for their homophobia such the military (Bérubé, 1990; Shilts, 1993) and organised religion, both mainstream (Helminiak, 1995; McNeill, 1988) and fundamentalist (Quinn, 1996; White, 1994).

Not all such studies necessarily refer to the distant past. For example, a number of books have examined elements of popular culture such as cinema and television. In his pioneering work, *The Celluloid Closet*, Russo (1981) illustrates how the gay individual was portrayed in cinema from its earliest days until the post Stonewall era. Hadleigh (1993) has studied the same topic in greater detail. These works reveal that until the modern gay movement, there were generally no positive portrayals of gay men and no use even of the term "homosexual" in mainstream films. Generally, such characters were only hinted at, mostly in a derogatory manner: gay male characters were portrayed as effeminate, weak, devious or deficient. Russo (1981) cites actors such as Franklin Pangborn and Edward Everett Horton who often played these "sissy" roles as he describes them. Official censorship and the codes adopted by major Hollywood studios did not permit any depiction of openly homosexual men, certainly not any positive depiction of them or their relationships. For the average cinema-goer of the pre-gay liberation era, the gay man was almost completely invisible or negatively portrayed. This cinematic invisibility merely reflected the social conditions of the day.

One consequence of the modern gay rights movement has been to reverse this process: screen representations are no longer limited to the traditional derogatory stereotypes of gay males as weak and effeminate. In recent years, popular films such as *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee, 2005) and *J. Edgar* (Eastwood, 2012) have portrayed gay males, both fictional and historic, who counter the former stereotypes.

Given this rather broad research context, it would seem that few stones have been left unturned since the advent of modern gay liberation when investigating gay issues and the gay experience in Western culture. Among other things, such research reflects that there have always been gay individuals in all major institutions of Western society and that their presence, both in terms of their sexuality and their

contributions, has hitherto been largely ignored and unacknowledged.

In contrast, the arena of men's sport has received comparatively little scholarly attention until relatively recently. Anderson (2005a, 2010) is one of the few researchers to have written extensively on this subject. Others such as Wellard (2002, 2003) and Woog (1998, 2002) have also examined gay sexuality in the context of organised sport. While much has been written on the sociology of sport within the context of masculinity generally, comparatively few researchers have examined it in any consistent or detailed manner in terms of the gay experience.

2.4 Gay Rights in Australia

In the Australian context, this paucity of research is still more noticeable. For example, there does not appear to have been any detailed, sociological critique of the country's major football codes, particularly the AFL, specifically in the context of homosexuality. While much has been written on sport and masculinity, comparatively little has been written on the gay perspective in the institution of sport.

Prior to 1975, homosexual acts were illegal in all Australian states. Not only were such acts subject to criminal prosecution but a homosexual orientation was officially regarded as a psychiatric illness by conventional medicine (Carter, 2004; Cook, 2010; Silverstein & White, 1977). The topic was rarely discussed in the media and gay men and women led largely very circumspect lives. In the past few decades the status of homosexuals has altered significantly—they and their issues such as decriminalisation, equal opportunity protection and relationship recognition have moved from the margins of society into the mainstream.

The concepts of gay rights, gay pride and homophobia have become part of the popular consciousness of contemporary Western society (Altman, 2013; D'Emilio, 2002; Escoffier, 1998). However this is not a global phenomenon and there are still many countries where the rights of homosexuals are severely curtailed. A recent television documentary entitled *Out There* highlighted that gay individuals are marginalised and have few rights in many countries including Russia and African nations such as Uganda and Nigeria (Fry, French & Thomas, 2013). Many nations still criminalise homosexual acts, such as Uganda (Bjorksater-Beylock, 2005) and Iran—which has the death penalty (Harrison, 2005)—while other countries such as Russia (Archer, 2013) restrict the rights of homosexuals. However, the lack of

human rights for gays in these countries is beyond the scope of this thesis, which concentrates on the professional team sports of modern, English-speaking nations such as Australia, Britain and the US.

In Australia, homosexuality has become increasingly visible and socially accepted over the past few decades. For example, gay newspapers and magazines (such as the Australian *DNA* and the British *Gay Times*) are readily available, gay characters often appear in films and television shows such as *Queer as Folk* and *Six Feet Under*, and many universities have social groups for homosexual students. Furthermore, issues affecting homosexuals such as the prospect of legalised gay marriage are widely discussed and reported in the media (Byrnes, 2013; Maiden, 2011; Tillett, 2013). This trend has also been evident in Great Britain and the US, largely as a result of the gay movements and lobby groups that have formed there. Consequently, an increasing number of males in Australian public life have openly declared their homosexuality, such as former High Court Judge Michael Kirby and former leader of the federal Greens party Bob Brown. Included in this group are athletes, some of whom have reached Olympic status such as the swimmer Daniel Kowalski and diver Matthew Mitcham (Aldrich & Wotherspoon, 2001; Stern, 2009).

2.5 Stonewall: Beginning of Reform and Gay Liberation

The focus of this section is to provide the historical and social context from which the modern gay rights movement arose in modern Western society and to highlight the major legal reforms that have been achieved as a result of this activism. It outlines the pivotal event that galvanised gay activists in the US and subsequently provided the stimulus for similar activism in other countries.

Reform movements do not occur in a social vacuum and usually not in clearly defined or delineated stages in complex modern societies. It is the historian and social scientist who attempt to ascribe clear categories and stages to social phenomena that do not possess the boundaries of inanimate physical entities (D'Emilio, 1983). It is still more difficult to delineate phenomena that are not easily observable, such as social tolerance and the attitudes that lead to significant social change (Carter, 2004).

Despite these difficulties of delineation, it is still possible to identify a few clear trends in the modern gay rights movement, specifically its onset. In the annals

of gay history, the origins of gay liberation are attributed to a specific date and place: the Stonewall Inn nightclub in New York on the weekend beginning on 27 June 1969. From this point, gay liberation came to exist in many groups around the world (Bullough, 1979, pp. 63-64). Generally, the gay rights movement shifted from viewing the problems of gays as individual concerns to be addressed in a piecemeal manner to seeing them within a broader sociological context, which questioned and sought to change the often discriminatory structures of society. According to Silverstein and Picano (1992), “unlike its predecessors, the American gay movement following the Stonewall riots became a “shot heard round the world”, and responsible for the explosive growth of the gay-rights movement not only in the United States but internationally as well” (p. 80).

While homophile groups existed prior to this date, these riots marked a significant change. The movement became more organised, more visible and, as a result, more militant. It rejected the conventional medical pronouncements of pathology, illness and abnormality and demanded full equality with the rest of society (D'Emilio, 1983; Miller, 2012). In practical terms, this began with calls for law reform, in particular the decriminalisation of homosexual acts among consenting adults. In the decades following the Stonewall riots, this law reform has been achieved in all states and territories of Australia, the US, all the nations comprising the European Union, and all other nations in Europe. (Altman, 2013; Baker, 2004; Joske, 2014; Marrs, 2012; *Spartacus international gay guide 2013-2014*, 2013). One consequence of these reforms is that successive generations have matured in a climate where homosexuality is no longer regarded as a crime or a psychiatric pathology; generally there are more diverse and less stereotypical images of gay men in the mainstream media.

A clear consequence of the modern gay liberation movement has been the largely unprecedented numbers of gay males who openly acknowledge their homosexuality, that is, publicly out as gay men. At no time in the history of modern society has this large-scale visibility been a reality or even possible, given the previous punitive legal codes against homosexual acts.

Although women have been a significant part of the modern gay movement, its early major goals such as decriminalisation were largely defined in terms of male homosexuality, as the criminal law did not tend to acknowledge or recognise female

homosexuality. In fact, lesbianism was not legally acknowledged in British law until 1994 (Lloyd & Mitchinson, 2012). Prior to this, it had never been criminalised or even mentioned in law within the British Empire (Tedeschi, 2012). Legally, this appears to have also been the case in the US. In this context, it is not surprising that men had a more visible presence in the early gay rights movement.

Modern gay liberation was part of a complex set of social phenomena, which emerged and found voice within a particular societal context. It did not suddenly emerge fully formed one weekend in 1969. Such reform movements are the result of various factors that converge at a particular time and within a particular set of circumstances. The next section examines the social context in the US, which led to the formation of a highly visible and vocal gay rights movement.

2.6 Alternate Reform Movements: Civil Rights, Women's Liberation and Anti-War Movements

To locate the advent of modern gay liberation within a specific social context, one needs to consider the emergence of other contemporary reform movements. Within the US, the civil rights movement was highly significant. This advocated basic civil rights for African-Americans. To some extent, this movement for social change served as a model for the gay rights movement, which followed it. Contemporaneous with this activism was the feminist movement, which advocated for, among other rights, equal opportunity in terms of employment and education for women (D'Emilio, 1983; Jagose, 1996; Jay & Young, 1978).

In addition, there was the anti-Vietnam war movement and the counter culture of the youth of the period: the beatnik generation and the hippies who succeeded them (Young cited in Jay & Young, 1978). These movements questioned many established values of conventional society, including its sexual mores. Overall, the convergence of these movements in the US and countries such as Australia and Great Britain led to a general questioning of established values and social institutions and practices such as conventional gender roles (Wilchins, 2004).

The questions that began to be asked or implied by these alternate social movements included: Were racial minorities (and women) entitled to the same opportunities of employment and education as the white male population? Did the government have the moral authority to conscript young men to fight and die in an

increasingly unpopular war? And, were homosexuals significantly different from or at all inferior to heterosexuals (D'Emilio, 1983; Jay & Young, 1978)? The spokespersons of these alternate social movements were asking these questions of the prevailing social order as represented by its authority figures including politicians and religious leaders. The public articulation of these questions inevitably made these groups ever more socially visible.

In this context, it is not surprising that a more visible and more militant gay liberation movement emerged (Altman, 2013; Escoffier, 1998). In his landmark study of the movement from the 1940s to the 1970s, D'Emilio (1983) illustrates how it gradually took form from influences both within its organisations and factors external to it such as the general political climate of the US at the time.

2.7 Social Visibility

In one of the earliest essays on the gay rights movement, Miller (2012) stressed the importance of social visibility to achieve positive change for gay individuals. He describes this as a positive affirmation of one's alternate sexuality: gay men and women needed to come out publicly, both as individuals to their peers, colleagues and families, and collectively in organised demonstrations and protests. This was necessary to counter negative stereotypes that arose from being invisible in mainstream society.

In adopting a stance of greater social visibility, the gay community became organised as a significant voice for reform and equality, which “demanded” change rather than politely and self-consciously “asking” for it. Instead of expecting the gay man to conform to societal expectations, gay liberationists challenged and sought to change social institutions to accommodate the gay man. As a result of the gay liberation movement, gay males have come out in a range of social institutions including the church, politics, and occupations as diverse as medicine, fashion design and popular music (Aldrich & Wotherspoon, 2001; Stern, 2009).

This trend is less obvious in occupations and institutions that are exclusively or predominantly male such as the military and professional team sports. Only one man from the professional football codes in Australia has ever acknowledged his homosexuality: former rugby league player Ian Roberts in 1995 (Freeman, 1997). The fact that no other former or current player from Australian football codes has

come out runs counter to this trend of the public disclosure of homosexuality. Specifically, the AFL appears totally unaffected by this trend and has remained ostensibly a “gay-free” zone. In fact, it was not until recently that the probability of gay AFL players has been even considered or openly discussed in the mainstream media (Akermanis, 2010; C Wilson, 2010). In the context of the gains made by the gay rights movement over the past four decades, it would seem that a study of this statistical absence is long overdue. The next section examines the comparative absence of openly gay men in professional sport and cites some of the studies of this phenomenon as well as the coming-out experiences of a few gay athletes.

2.8 Professional Sport and the Closet

The absence of openly gay players in the AFL reflects a trend in professional team sports in general and football codes in particular throughout other Western nations such Britain and the US. For example, in the major football code of the US, gridiron, only a handful of players have come out, such as Dave Kopay (2001), Roy Simmons (2006) and Esera Tuaolo (2006). Significantly, they did so after ending their professional careers. In the major British football code, soccer, only one player has ever come out: Justin Fashanu in 1990 (Read, 2012). In Australia, only the rugby player Roberts has ever come out, in 1995 (Freeman, 1997). There are also examples in other football codes overseas such as soccer in Canada ("One more for our team," 2012) and Gaelic football in Ireland (Og Cusack, 2009). A more recent example is the former professional German soccer player Thomas Hitzlsperger, who came out in January 2014 (Ornstein, 2014).

The relatively few numbers of openly gay professional footballers is consistent with a more general trend within mainstream team sports. The research over the past two decades reflects that the gay experience of sport is not a positive one. Significantly, many gay athletes often felt the need to deny and conceal their sexuality in an all-male sporting environment. Conversely, heterosexual banter appears to be an accepted norm in such an environment. Pronger (1990), Anderson (2010) and Woog (2002) have illustrated that the gay male participant does not feel welcome in conventional sporting bodies, particularly those of team sports. This appears to be a clear pattern across contemporary Western society. An Australian study into a range of team sports and physical education in the school system, *Come Out to Play* (Symons et al., 2010), reflected the findings of the North American

researchers such as Anderson (2005a) as well as other studies from Great Britain (Jones & McCarthy, 2010). These studies found that gay individuals tended to feel more comfortable and supported in amateur sporting teams and clubs that consisted primarily of gay members or were overtly gay-friendly with stated policies of gay inclusion.

These trends in mainstream sport reflect a more general aspect of social change in relation to the broader gay rights movement. While the movement has resulted in many changes and benefits for gay individuals over recent decades, the rate of change appears to be much slower in the realm of professional athletics. For example, Pronger (2000) summarises the North American experience over the past two decades by illustrating that fewer than two dozen athletes have publicly come out (e.g. former tennis player Martina Navratilova and Olympic diver Greg Louganis) and only a few of these had significant public profiles. Moreover, only a few of these athletes continued their professional careers following this public admission (e.g. Navratilova, Louganis and, more recently, Australian Olympic diver Mathew Mitcham and US basketball player Jason Collins). It would seem that the effect of publicly coming out has been negligible on transforming conventional sporting culture into a gay-friendly environment.

Since Pronger's (2000) assessment, high-profile professional athletes continue to come out, but their number remains comparatively small, especially in team sports. This is despite over four decades of gay liberation politics. Furthermore, the findings of researchers such as Symons et al. (2010), Anderson (2005a) and Wellard (2003) suggest that mainstream sporting culture remains largely homophobic, though the degree of homophobia may vary from one sporting context to another as in the case of individual and team sports.

The following statement by Pronger (2000), made over a decade ago, still appears valid: "[I am] aware of no scholarly research that shows mainstream sport to be a significantly welcome environment for sexual minorities" (p. 224). Such feelings of alienation from professional sport are reflected in a more recent Australian example. Olympic swimming champion Daniel Kowalski who came out after his retirement elaborated on how feeling the need to conceal his sexuality contributed to a low self-esteem (Symons et al., 2010). Referring to his time as a closeted gay athlete, he highlights his loneliness, isolation and negative self-image.

Kowalski (2010) states,

growing up in sport and subsequently working in it has made the whole acceptance of who I am extremely difficult for many reasons, but most of all for feeling as though there was nobody there to help me through. (p. 21)

While Kowalski's negative experience may be typical of the professional gay athlete, it does not negate the fact that social attitudes have become more tolerant and accepting of the gay male. It is possible to discern marked improvements in social acceptance when contrasting his experience with that of gay athletes several decades earlier such as former professional US gridiron player Dave Kopay, one of the first professional footballers to come out. Kopay's autobiography (Kopay & Young, 2001) reflects not only the extent to which general tolerance and understanding have improved for gay men in professional sport but also how certain things have remained largely unchanged.

Kopay came out in the mid-seventies after his professional career had ended. Earlier in his playing career he approached a psychiatrist to assist him with his depression. However, the psychiatrist would not accept that he was homosexual, specifically because he did not evince any of the overt traits of the "typical" homosexual. This doctor could not accept that a clearly masculine male—who displayed the traits of hegemonic masculinity—could be anything other than heterosexual. He advised Kopay to contract a heterosexual marriage as a "cure". Significantly, this occurred in the 1960s before the advent of the militant gay rights movement. This attests to how prevalent and pervasive the negative stereotypes of male homosexuals as weak and effeminate were at this time when homosexuality was regarded as a psychiatric disorder. It also reflects that there were no overtly positive role models or stereotypes for gay males, especially in professional sport.

Kopay's experience as a gay professional footballer encapsulates many aspects of the public persona of the professional athlete. Specifically, it highlights the primacy of hegemonic masculinity. For the gay professional athlete, this may often be expressed in a denial of one's homosexuality and, conversely, a tacit or even overt embrace of heterosexuality. In the context of the AFL, this may be a long-standing practice.

In the post gay liberation era of the past 40 years or more, there would easily

be several thousands of former AFL players, but none has felt the need or confidence or had the required support to declare their homosexuality, even from the security of retirement. In the absence of any such testimony, one can only speculate on possible reasons for this continuing reluctance to disclose homosexuality.

Despite the growing acceptance of gay relationships in Australian society, certain gay men continue to keep their homosexuality secret from all their significant contacts. Some may even go as far as to undertake heterosexual marriage to conceal their alternate sexuality, particularly if they hold prominent social positions. There are numerous examples throughout history of gay males in Western society who have done so, from nineteenth-century wit and playwright Oscar Wilde to Hollywood actors Anthony Perkins and Rock Hudson (Stern, 2009). A more recent Australian example is former federal Health Minister Neal Blewett, who only came out after the death of his heterosexual partner (Aldrich & Wotherspoon, 2001).

It would appear that something associated with the public persona of an AFL player negates being open about one's homosexuality. This "something" is unlikely to be one specific, tangible and quantifiable entity. On a broader level, professional football intersects with a number of other institutions such as the media, as well as social constructs of masculinity. On the micro level, an individual player faces a range of personal issues, including familial commitments and financial sponsorship. They may have entered into a heterosexual marriage, lucrative sponsorship deal or other business commitments to succeed in their professional sporting career. These commitments will vary from player to player. Given such diversity of individual circumstances, there cannot be one specific condition, applicable to all players in all contexts, which prevents openness concerning an alternate sexuality.

The rigorous recruiting process for the professional AFL suggests that those who succeed would regard themselves as part of a sporting elite or privileged group (Hickey & Kelly, 2010). It would seem that professional footballers are viewed and view themselves as significantly different from other men in our society: as a class apart in the sense that they are an elite group of professionals. This difference appears to stem from how certain male athletes are viewed in Australian society and, by extension, how professional sportsmen are viewed. This issue links to the broader construct of masculinity, specifically to the type of masculinity that promotes and is dominant in professional team sports. One consequence of the visibility of gay men

in mainstream society since the advent of the modern gay rights movement has been a questioning of the masculinity that dominates professional sport.

This visibility has contributed not only to a reassessment of conventional views of sexuality but also to a questioning of traditional categories of gender. In a little over two decades, the militant and organised gay rights movement has contributed to the formation of queer theory. The next section examines the development of this phenomenon in the context of the modern gay rights movement and its reaction to the AIDS crisis of the early 1980s, as well as in a broader sociological context that includes other social movements of the twentieth century. Although these predate the modern gay rights movement, they display parallels with aspects of gay liberation and queer theory.

2.9 Queer Theory and Some of its Antecedents: Psychoanalysis, Bloomsbury and Sexology

Queer theory arose during the early 1990s as a response to the AIDS crisis and to the largely inadequate response of various governments to it (Levy & Johnson, 2012). It was a reaction, in the form of a new adversarial politics, to a system within which gays had little or no political voice. Part of its agenda was to question the prevailing concepts and definitions of gender. Specifically, it rejected the traditional masculine/feminine dyad as the innate consequence of a biological determinism (Wilchins, 2004). As a consequence, it saw all the social dichotomies of male and female, heterosexual and homosexual not as binary opposites but more as social constructs that alter over time and place (Johnston & Longhurst, 2010).

In this context, “queer” came to be associated with sexual difference that did not fit within the clearly defined mainstream parameters of Western society. As a concept, it challenges the conventional definitions of gender and sexuality, specifically the traditional dyads male/female and heterosexual/homosexual (J. Butler, 1990; Grosz & Probyn, 1996; Wilchins, 2004). It became a more inclusive term acknowledging a broader range of sexual identity and experience that includes, for example, transgender and intersex individuals, cross-dressers and bisexuals. In acknowledging the diversity of the sexually marginalised, it illustrates the limited nature of conventional definitions of sex and sexuality. In giving such sexual minorities a degree of social visibility and a political voice, queer theory challenged

social taboos and revealed how deeply ingrained they are within an individual's psyche. It highlighted that perceived sexual deviance among consenting adults is constructed within a specific context that determines and labels acts and bodies as negative or positive (J. Butler, 1990).

According to Levy and Johnson (2012), there may not be a single, concise definition of the term "queer" in the context of queer theory and activism; however, it is clear that the gay liberation movement has redefined the term, reclaiming it and transforming its connotations. Prior to the advent of queer theory, the term was used as a derogatory slur for gay men and women. However, over the past two decades it has come to stand for a range of sexually marginalised individuals and groups. Thus, it has shed its once negative connotations and is now seen as a positive affirmation of individual difference. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (2009) explains its recent semantic changes as follows:

The word queer was first used to mean "homosexual" in the early 20th century: it was originally, and usually still is, a deliberately derogatory term when used by heterosexual people. In recent years, however, gay people have taken the word "queer" and deliberately used it in place of "gay" or "homosexual", in an attempt, by using the word positively, to deprive it of its negative power. ("Concise Oxford English Dictionary," 2009, p. 1177)

While only one example, it effectively conveys that even highly negative terms can be altered within a comparatively short period of time. Similarly, this linguistic relativity suggests that what society defines as "acceptable" in terms of bodies and sexual practices is also fluid rather than fixed.

Not only has the term "queer" changed from negative to positive connotations, it has also been expanded its designations as noun and adjective to that of a verb: to queer. This sense has a number of connotations. For example, Hall (2003) refers to "queering" as a potential threat to systems of classification in relation to sexuality and desire. He also sees it as a verbal means of putting pressure on simplistic notions of identity and disturbing the otherwise neat delineation between normal and abnormal. Similarly, Probyn (1996) talks of "queering the object" as a means of alternate definition, moving beyond the definition of homosexual in terms of the heterosexual norm.

In my view, queer theory and activism can be seen as the culmination and extension of certain elements of the progressive feminist and psychoanalytic movements of the past. For example, it echoes the work of analytical psychologist Carl Jung (Jung, 1989), who elaborated the concept of the “contra-sexual” selves within the archetypal terms of male animus and female anima. His understanding was that no individual, regardless of their biological gender, was completely male or female; their inner psychic functioning contained elements of both sexes. In this sense, gender is not restricted to a solely biological concept within an individual’s psyche.

Jung’s predecessor and the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, had equally unconventional views on the human psyche and the role sexuality played in it. For example, his clinical work led him to conclude that human nature was inherently “bisexual”. In a letter to a colleague, he wrote that he was becoming accustomed: “to the idea of regarding every sexual act as a process in which four persons are involved” (cited in Wollheim, 1987, p. 120). While such opinions would hardly be considered unpalatable today, at the time—the late Victorian era—the general public would have regarded them as shocking and even perverse.

Posterity has shown that some of Freud’s views on sexuality have been vindicated to some extent. For example, it was not until after World War II that any major large-scale studies of sexual behaviour were undertaken. The first significant study was of male sexuality by Kinsey in 1948 (cited in Bullough, 1979), which was detailed and representative as it included 12,000 participants. Until then, there were no accurate statistics on the “sexual behaviour of the human male” as Kinsey titled his study (Gathorne-Hardy, 2005). One of its shocking findings was that homosexual acts were much more common than had generally been supposed. Furthermore, it appeared that a large number of men engaged in both heterosexual and homosexual acts throughout their lives. This was the first hint that heterosexuality was not as universal as mainstream society portrayed it. It also raised interesting and potentially embarrassing questions for those who espoused sexual orthodoxy. If homosexual acts were so statistically common, could they continue to be branded as deviant or abnormal (Bullough, 1979)? In terms of sexuality, there was now a discernible rift between what was commonly accepted and what actually transpired behind closed doors, between appearance and reality. What Freud had speculated about sexuality

on the basis of his case studies and clients (cited in Breger, 2000) had, after nearly 50 years, come to be supported indirectly by systematic social research into sexual behaviour (Bullough, 1979; Isay, 1989; Lewes, 1988).

Such issues of gender and sexuality were not only the province of psychoanalysts in the early decades of the twentieth century. Feminist authors such as Virginia Woolf also contributed much to the discussion of conventional gender roles through both her fiction and non-fiction. She was also a member of an intellectual elite, the Bloomsbury Group, who questioned many aspects of their society (Lehmann, 1987). Although a loose association of individuals with no formal structure or academic doctrine such as that of psychoanalysis, one of their common precepts was that human relationships were of primary importance (Bell, 1997). As this implied an understanding of sexuality in broader terms than in conventional society, homosexuality and bisexuality were more readily accepted within this select group. As a talented and popular author, Woolf could convey to a broader public some of her and her peers' unconventional views on sex and sexuality, which echo the rejection of rigid gender categories by queer theory.

This is effectively illustrated in one of her most popular novels, *Orlando* (Woolf, 1982), which was filmed in 1992 (Potter). It is an elaborate piece of fantasy described by her as a biography, detailing the very long and eventful life of a courtier of Elizabeth I. Orlando lives right into the twentieth century. While his longevity is startling enough, Orlando is inexplicably transformed into a woman halfway through the novel. As a result of this transformation, Orlando undergoes a significant reversal of fortune. For example, once he becomes a woman, she loses her property, which is only returned to him/her once he/she gives birth to a son. *Orlando* can be viewed both as a comic mockery of conventional gender roles and sexuality as well as a not-so-subtle feminist critique of contemporary society. Whatever the level of subtlety, it is clear that Woolf was mocking conventional and rather rigid gender roles just as later, queer theory would reject them.

This critique of contemporary sex roles is also found in her non-fiction works. In her famous polemic, *A Room of One's Own* (1981), she argues that just as there are male and female bodies, each individual possesses aspects of a male and female mind. She concludes that a great mind, at least in terms of creative genius, is essentially "androgynous", thereby marking the gender boundaries as false in the

sense that they are constructed by culture. Her view of the sexes and their relative traits and standing in society are a precursor to queer theory. Through her writings, Woolf not only drew attention to but also mocked and questioned the more traditional masculine/feminine gender dyad of her society.

Intellectuals such as Freud, Jung and Woolf experienced the rigid categories of gender stereotypes and constructs of the Victorian era, which stressed the differences between the sexes rather than the similarities (Appignanesi & Forrester, 1992; DeSalvo, 1990; Wehr, 1989). In one sense, their intellectual contributions to Western thought were a reaction to and an acknowledgement of these rigid social constructs of gender and sexuality. In their respective disciplines, they were questioning the gender categories of their eras. In this sense, they influenced thinking about overtly disruptive gender categories of queer theory and queer activism.

Queer theory and activism have legitimated previously marginalised and hidden aspects of sexuality and gender identity. The scandals of the Victorian era such as those of Oscar Wilde (Ellman, 1988), Frederick Park and Ernest Boulton (McKenna, 2013) revealed that a gay subculture existed within seemingly respectable society. Within this subculture, gay men, cross-dressers and transgender individuals flouted conventional definitions of masculinity. Long before the advent of gay liberation, they were a significant if largely invisible presence in mainstream, post-industrial Western society.

In the post gay liberation era of the early twenty-first century, gay men are no longer as socially invisible as they were in the Victorian era. This means that issues pertaining to sexual minorities such as gay men can be more easily studied. Authors have examined issues of sex and gender in relation to the emerging discipline of queer theory. For Wilchins (2004), a fundamental starting point was the observable difference between male and female bodies. Masculinity and femininity are the prototypes based on the biological, or “real”, differences of physical gender. Given this, anything that does not fit this gender binary such as “male femininity” or “female masculinity” is seen as a gendered “failure”. Only rarely does social convention in post-industrial, Western society permit any blurring of these distinct gender categories as in the case of the professional drag artist. While such performers transgress traditional gender roles, they still portray an image of recognisable femininity. According to Wilchins (2004), they “work” since the impersonators

stylise their gestures in ways that are familiar and which we recognise as feminine. Although one is aware the performer is not a woman, his/her audience tends to see one since he/she is “performing” a woman in imitating a familiar image of femininity (J. Butler, 1990).

Queer theory also elucidates the idea of gender as performance; as something manifested by means of overt display and specific language. In this context, items such as articles of clothing and other accessories not only reference a particular gender but constitute it for the individual (Wilchins, 2004). By means of dress and mannerisms, one creates the social state of being a specific gender. In a broader sense, all gender can be construed as a form of protracted and consistent performance. This performative aspect of gender is largely unconscious, unlike the more conscious performance of drag for example (Butler cited in Wilchins, 2004). Just as gender is created by linguistic and other social definitions, it is maintained in society by this overt performance. Thus “woman-ness” or “man-ness” does not exist independently of the actions and words that characterise and define it (Butler cited in Richardson, 2009).

Similarly, when the professional footballer puts on his team colours and takes part in the ritual of a game, he is enacting a particular form of masculinity that is highly valued in society and extends beyond his uniform and performance on the field. For example, when he appears in the media following a match, he will speak in a certain manner and use certain terms; his language will form part of his public persona as a player. The more popular and well known he is, the more he will be associated with his professional role. Even when not wearing his team colours, he will be viewed by the public as a particular player of a particular club and an embodiment of the masculinity associated with this sport. While this masculinity is overt and pervasive, it is a dynamic social construct that is moulded by the circumstances of a particular culture at a particular time. Since it is not a static monolith within our culture, it is affected by social change, including mass reform movements whose effects may be piecemeal and gradual.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the dominant pattern of masculinity within the context of AFL and other football codes and team sports. It has juxtaposed this

masculinity against the changes wrought by the modern gay movement and subsequent queer theory. This movement has had a significant effect on contemporary society: it has changed or at least questioned traditional forms of masculinity. This chapter has examined whether and to what extent any of these effects are discernible within the professional sporting environment.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the prevailing trends of masculinity within the context of professional team sports and their evolution—as well as parallels with other male-dominated institutions such as the military. This will provide some avenues for analysis and illustrate that the topic of this thesis is linked to a number of interconnected and complex social phenomena. The historical context of post-industrial society will help elucidate the prominence of organised sport within our culture and the type of masculinity it promotes. This, in turn, will help explain the comparative absence of the openly gay man within professional football codes.

Chapter 3: Masculinities: Hegemonic vs. Inclusive

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine the formation of a particular type of masculinity, namely hegemonic masculinity within modern Western society. In particular, it draws on Connell's (1995) concept of hegemony in her work *Masculinities*. It will discuss specific factors of post-industrial society that have contributed to the formation of this masculinity and the role of popular sport in its formation and maintenance. The chapter will provide a historical context to the emergence of this specific, hegemonic masculinity in terms of post-industrial society. In addition, it will explain how popular sport has excluded the openly gay male until relatively recently.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the social effects of the Industrial Revolution, such as the sexual division of labour and familial structure that resulted from the industrialisation and the urbanisation it fostered. This is followed by an examination of the changing role of sport in modern society; specifically how its importance evolved beyond mere physical recreation and mass entertainment to become a significant institution in the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity for successive generations of males. This form of socially approved masculinity did not countenance homosexuality. Moreover, in the post-industrial era homosexuality came to be defined and categorised within the medical context of pathology.

This chapter examines contemporary sporting culture and the masculinity it promotes, specifically in its historical context. Since prominent institutions such as professional sporting bodies evolve within a particular social context, their development reflects the significant changes occurring at a particular time and place. Thus, the development of professional sport is a consequence of many factors pertaining to the development of modern, industrial society.

The relative absence of openly gay males in professional, mainstream sport is a long-standing cultural phenomenon. It implies that homosexuality is incompatible with the professional sportsman and the type of masculinity espoused by mainstream

sport. This incompatibility appears to be a tacit but pervasive assumption that has its origins in the historical evolution of mainstream sport as a significant modern social institution (Anderson, 2010; Burstyn, 1999; Pronger, 1990).

3.2 Men in Post-Industrial Society

Authors such as Anderson (2010), Burstyn (1999) and Wellard (2002) show that in the pre-industrial era organised sport did not have the popular appeal or social importance it currently enjoys. While organised sporting contests have long existed in various forms among specific social classes, the distinct form of sporting culture in modern society stems from the Industrial Revolution when sport began to be regarded as an important aspect of a male's education and became an official component of the education curriculum. Anderson (2010), Burstyn (1999) and Wellard (2002) describe how organised sport became much more significant in popular culture as an indirect result of the Industrial Revolution during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Thus, organised sport evolved into a significant institution in response to the changes in work patterns wrought by the Industrial Revolution. Burstyn (1999) illustrates that in pre-industrial, rural society, fathers played a much greater role in the supervision and education of their sons. For example, sons would often follow their father's trade or profession. As a result, their fathers were often responsible for their apprenticeship. In this and other less formal ways, fathers were a dominant presence in their sons' lives in a society with distinct class and gender boundaries. Industrialisation and the urbanisation it spawned resulted in a shift of the workplace away from the home and farm, which meant that the father figure of the family was absent for much of the day. As a result, children spent most of their day, whether at home or at school, in the company of women who gradually took on the primary role in child rearing. Inevitably, children became segregated from their fathers. This regular absence of a father figure and the constant exposure to females was assumed to be detrimental to boys, as they might become weak, soft and effeminate without a male role model to teach them "correct" masculine values.

The growth of cities led to another development that would ultimately be viewed as a further threat to boys' development of conventional masculinity. Increased urbanisation indirectly led to the emergence of a homosexual identity in

modern society. The concept of gay men as a distinct social group emerged gradually and followed a path similar to the development of modern feminism as discussed by Anderson (2010), who reveals that the increased urbanisation made social activism and organisation much easier for women and other minorities.

The growth of cities led to minorities such as gay men forming networks, which would have been more difficult in a rural setting. Researchers such as Benemann (2006) have shown that by the nineteenth century, the local police forces in large cities such as Berlin and Paris had evolved policies to deal with gay men soliciting for sex in public places. By this time, gay men were already a presence in society, albeit a socially censured one. One consequence of this presence was to attract the attention of the medical establishment, which began scholarly research into the phenomenon of homosexuality. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, scholars such as Ulrichs and Krafft-Ebbing (Cited in Bullough, 1979) sought to classify such acts as belonging to a particular type of person. Thus the concepts of homosexual and heterosexual began to emerge, thereby becoming identifiable categories within contemporary society. According to Anderson (2010), once the gay male could be identified and categorised, he could then be vilified and marginalised in modern society, which had no specified role for the gay man in terms of the reconfigured familial structure and sexual division of both paid and domestic labour.

The interest of the medical profession enhanced this process of the categorisation of homosexuality and the newly emerging branch of psychiatry further legitimated this process. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the medical profession began to speculate on the subject of homosexuality. Initially, the influence of medicine and psychiatry led to homosexuality being categorised as an illness or pathology: homosexuality increasingly came to be viewed within the context of a disease model (D'Emilio, 1983). Inevitably, this negative categorisation led to various theories of causation: that homosexuality in men might result from innate or environmental factors. For example, one psychoanalytic theory implied that homosexuality might be caused by certain factors such as the “overprotective mother” and “absent/distant father” (Lewes, 1988). According to this premise, boys and young men could be adversely influenced into becoming homosexual. While the general public of the time might not have been familiar with the nuances of such theories, there was a belief or rather a fear that homosexuality could be spread by

environmental factors such as family upbringing (Isay, 1989; Lewes, 1988). In this context, Anderson (2010) suggests that traditional masculinity of this period felt threatened by the potential of homosexual “contagion” and sought ways to counteract the circumstances that might contribute to it.

By the end of the nineteenth century, such views on the development of masculinity and sexuality were widely held by the general public of post-industrial society. That these views on masculinity were widely accepted is reflected in the hysteria that resulted from the infamous trial of Oscar Wilde in 1895 (Ellman, 1988). The fact that a man from what was considered “respectable society” could indulge in the practice of sodomy was viewed not only as a serious threat to public morality but also a transgression against the accepted view of masculinity as exclusively heterosexual (Bullough, 1979; Katz, 1976, 2001). His trial also revealed the existence of a contemporary subculture of “sodomites”. The reaction of authorities implied that if such conduct was not severely punished, the youth of that society might become easily “infected” (Ellman, 1988; Lauritsen & Thorstad, 1974).

This view of homosexuality depicts it as something that might be easily spread among society’s youth, given the right conditions. These contemporary public reactions reflect the conviction that certain environmental factors are the “cause” of homosexuality and that conversely, other social factors can ensure it does not propagate itself. In this sense, these factors become viewed as the sociological “corrective” or cure-all for male homosexuality (Anderson, 2010; Pronger, 1990).

3.3 Sport as Antidote for Homosexuality in Post-Industrial Society

Within this context, it is not surprising that organised, competitive sport came to be regarded as an effective “antidote” and social compensation for a traditional masculinity compromised by significant changes in family structure and work patterns in the home (Burgess, Edwards, & Skinner, 2003). From its inception, organised competitive sport was an exclusively masculine preserve and as such existed to emphasise differences between the genders. For boys and the working class men they became, organised sport developed as a forum to display socially approved traits of masculinity (Anderson, 2010; E Anderson & McGuire, 2010; Pronger, 1990).

The competitive displays on the sports field not only reflected the physical

nature of men's work but as authors such as Cashmore and Cleland (2011) have shown, they also compensated for the loss of their more physically rigorous labour of the pre-industrial era. Pronger (1990) and Cashmore and Cleland (2011) state that sport became the new arena for displays of an exclusive masculinity; a legitimate forum for men to display aspects of an approved masculinity. Through the exclusion of women, its stress on physical strength and aggression and values such as discipline and obedience, sport created a homosocial environment where men could allay their fears of femininity and homosexuality. Acts of physical strength, competitiveness and aggression on a sports field become the overt features of a socially revered masculinity.

According to this analysis, the masculinity of the pre-industrial era became compromised by the changing socio-economic circumstances of a post-industrial society. As a result, the contemporary masculinity sought a social space where it could reassert itself. This social space excluded women as participants as this masculinity sought to reflect the difference and, by implication, the superiority of masculinity in a changing society (Burstyn, 1999; Pronger, 1990).

The changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution to the workplace and patterns of work—from the home or farm to the factory, and the resulting sexual division of labour—had significant implications for a range of social institutions such as familial structure and formal education. Formal education (and the role of organised sport within it) became more significant in the transmission of existing patterns of masculinity to successive generations (Burstyn, 1999). Sport became a form of apprenticeship for boys into a socially constructed and highly valued masculinity, a vehicle by which boys might acquire “correct”, masculine values. As Pronger (1990) eloquently summarises: “The legacy of sports as an apprenticeship in masculinity has carried on to the present” (p. 17).

Thus, it is no accident that professional sport is largely a male preserve: while women have long been professional athletes, they are generally underrepresented in the media and often do not share the same financial remuneration. Anderson (2011a) and Burstyn (1999) have illustrated this phenomenon in the US, and Phillips (1997) and Bartlett (2006) have found similar disparities in long-term coverage between

men's and women's sport in Australia. Moreover, in terms of national football codes, women are practically invisible. Organised sport such as professional football remains an exclusively male institution where men display a particular form of dominant masculinity. This masculinity has its origins in the traits that were seen as the overt and distinctive features of the working man since the post-industrial age.

3.4 Hegemonic Masculinity

This section aims to examine the dominant patterns of masculinity in professional team sports and other predominantly masculine institutions such as the military in Australia and other modern nations such as the US. This examination of masculinities will shed light on the comparative absence of the openly gay male within such institutions and show that it is not mere coincidence but that the prevailing masculinity in these institutions is not compatible with the concept of the openly gay male.

Connell (2008), Anderson (2010) and Buchbinder (2013) have examined the perceived traits of masculinity in modern society and shown that not only are there diverse definitions of it but that among these definitions, there is a hierarchy in which some are more highly valued than others. "Hegemonic masculinity" embodies all the socially desirable traits of this particular gender term. Connell (1995, 2002) views hegemonic masculinity as an instrument of patriarchal structure in contemporary society, which ensures the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. Anderson (2010) reflects these sentiments of domination as a reason for the continued gender segregation within organised team sports, while Buchbinder (2013) develops this concept of hegemony further by emphasising that it is viewed as a "natural" and "reasonable" process of gender relations. He also stresses that hegemonic masculinity is defined within a particular cultural and historic context.

While there is no definitive concept of hegemonic masculinity, there are a number of traits that are associated with it such as authority and power over others, as well as competitiveness, physical strength and aggression (Buchbinder, 2013). These traits are favourably viewed as parts of a socially approved form of masculinity. Generally, they are enacted within a context where males are required to dominate one another, either covertly as in the context of a competitive labour market or more overtly as in the context of a sporting field.

It is no accident that the overt physical aspects of these characteristics are evident within the context of competitive sport. In this forum, they can be displayed as the distinctive traits of a masculinity that strives to compete and dominate others in the pursuit of a legitimate prize or victory. In the process of this display, some forms of aggression and violence are legitimated and even valorised as “manly”, as a significant part of what society defines as “masculine” (Keddie, 2006, p. 292).

In her concept of “hegemonic masculinity”, Connell (2008) describes gender as a system of social relations and highlights how educational institutions are instrumental in reproducing hegemonic masculinity through a range of measures. In this context, schools are mechanisms for creating the prevalent gender distinctions that permeate modern society. The existing school system tends to segregate the learning experience of boys and girls, and sees their educational needs as significantly different. This is reflected in various ways, both overt and covert, beginning with the gender division of the teaching profession. Primary and pre-primary teachers are and have long been predominantly female. This remains the subject of official concern in regard to the education of boys (Connell, 1989, 2008).

The fears of the early days of industrialisation still linger—that this gender imbalance in favour of female teachers might, in some way, be detrimental to boys’ development. Connell (2008) cites at least one Australian Senate report where this is outlined as a potential risk to boys’ education. She elaborates that this concern is based on a set of assumptions regarding the development of boys and their corresponding masculinity. For example, it presumes that boys need masculine role models in early childhood and that they follow a fixed pathway in this development. In recent years other consequences of this lack of role models at primary school level have been highlighted, namely the perceived academic underachievement of boys relative to girls.

Research in recent years has focused on the patterns of boys’ learning within the formal education structure of contemporary society. Weaver-Hightower (2003) points to this trend as a reaction to the previous focus on girls in the education system. He alludes to this new emphasis in boy-centred learning and teaching as the “boy turn” in education and places it within the context of what is termed a “crisis of masculinity”. Although definitions of this crisis vary, he describes it as a commonly held perception that “men in society are acting in harmful ways toward themselves or

others because of conditions in the culture, economy, or politics that prevent them from fulfilling a culturally specific ‘traditional’ hegemonic masculine role” (Weaver-Hightower, 2003, p. 3). In other words, this discomfort emanates from the perception that men are being stifled in fulfilling a particular prescribed role of masculinity, in this case hegemonic masculinity.

In his examination of the “boy turn” and the alleged crisis of masculinity, Weaver-Hightower (2003) cites a number of diverse studies, which offer a range of analyses on boys’ education and recent patterns of their academic underachievement. He illustrates that it is rather simplistic to assume that issues in boys’ education can be reduced to a simple dichotomy of gender in the classroom. He stresses that a variety of factors affect boys in schools and the dichotomy between boys’ and girls’ learning might be largely artificial in that they are not totally mutually exclusive categories. Finally, he stresses that any crisis in boys’ education does not affect all boys equally, as factors such as race and social class are highly significant in any adverse effects on education: certain groups of boys are more likely to be affected than others and not all boys are affected. Skelton (2000) also emphasises that factors such as social class, ethnicity and sexuality need to be recognised as significant in the schooling experience of particular groups of boys. There can be no “one-size-fits-all” solutions to the issues of boys’ education.

Despite these different perspectives on boys’ learning, the fact remains that boys learn their respective masculinities from various male role models in their vicinity. Clearly, masculinity is not an innate trait that inevitably emerges fully formed in all boys as they develop. According to Skelton (2000), the type of masculinity that emerges is dependent on the nature of the models boys are regularly exposed to.

These sentiments regarding appropriate role models for boys were reflected in a brief West Australian newspaper article by Hiatt (2010), which quoted a head of the local West Australian Primary Principals Association’s concern at the rising number of schools without any male teachers as “disadvantaging” younger children and compared it to the experience of children in single parent families. Similar sentiments are reflected in articles from Britain and the US (Collins & Askar, 2012; Paton, 2012), which discuss this lack of male teachers and its presumed negative effect on boys learning. Clearly, the absence of a male role model in an educational

setting was seen as detrimental as it implies male children will not develop according to some correct and naturally predetermined path towards “hegemonic masculinity”, the dominant and socially desirable pattern of masculinity in this perspective.

This concern at the lack of male role models highlights an inherent contradiction within the social concept of gender and masculinity: on the one hand, it is assumed that boys and girls are inherently different and that these differences are biologically determined; on the other hand, it is feared that these inherent differences will not manifest themselves without the correct, supportive environment. In this view, gender is not exclusively biologically determined; nature needs the assistance of nurture. This reflects the fears of early post-industrialisation that boys risk becoming feminised in a predominantly female environment (Anderson, 2005a, 2010).

These same fears about the development of masculinity in young boys are also reflected in the “contagion” theory of homosexuality. For example, in previous decades, it was feared that openly gay male schoolteachers might have an “undue” influence on their young charges. Such a fear arose in Queensland in the 1970s and attracted national attention at the time (Robinson, 2010). Greg Weir, a qualified and openly gay teacher, was denied employment by the state government because it felt that he might exert an undue influence on his potential (and especially male) students (Moore, 2001). This exclusion of the openly gay male teacher became an official policy of the state government of the time. These authors draw attention to the ambiguity of the role of environmental and inherent factors in the formation of masculinity: while conventional masculinity is presumed to be the manifestation of innate biological factors, it appears to be highly vulnerable to environmental variables. In fact, in the case of overt homosexuality (an openly gay male school teacher), it might be derailed altogether. In this context, “hegemonic masculinity” is synonymous with heterosexuality.

Connell (2005b; 2008) effectively shows that schools operate on and promote a dichotomised view of gender where boys are viewed as naturally different to girls in matters such as their psychology, attitudes and aspirations. Connell (2005b; 2008) illustrates the parameters of this simplified view: boys are essentially the same and marked by a “natural” masculinity. Moreover, only men can truly understand and transmit this masculinity as they appreciate the importance of its overt manifestations

such as competition, emotional control and aggression. These traits of hegemonic masculinity are regularly displayed in the arena of competitive team sports. Under this premise of an all-encompassing masculinity, there is no allowance for the boy who deviates from the socially accepted and valued norm encapsulated in hegemonic masculinity. This viewpoint will be developed further in the next section.

3.5 Masculinity and Sport

Other Australian researchers such as Keddie (2003) have shown that from an early age boys are exposed to and taught to revere the traits associated with hegemonic masculinity, such as physical strength, endurance, competitiveness and aggression. This occurs primarily within the context of educational institutions and specifically within the arena of organised team sports. These studies illustrate that the education system regularly colludes in this acquisition by actively encouraging the characteristics associated with success in sport and assumes that these characteristics are natural and inherent traits of boys generally.

Bartholomaeus' (2011) study of primary school children found that sport was associated with masculinity in the sense that it was more recognised as a part of male rather than female achievement. Furthermore, the group of children studied felt that sport was something that all boys participate in or should be interested in: sport was often viewed as being "for" boys rather than for girls. It would seem that from a very early age sport is associated with masculinity and a particular type of masculinity. This study reflected similar themes to an earlier study by Keddie (2003), which found that while boys who excelled in sport were lionised within the school environment, those who did not excel or who avoided sport altogether tended to be marginalised. This group tended to be labelled with derogatory terms such as "sissy", "gay" or "girl" (Keddie, 2003, p. 79). Such terms reflect the gender stereotypes prevalent during the formative periods of organised sport within the education system. From this study, it appears that boys readily internalise the conventional dichotomy of masculine and feminine within the context of sport. Through this process, they also internalise the latent misogyny and homophobia associated with it (Keddie, 2003). Keddie (2003) also stresses that while educators have little motivation to question the popular model of sporting masculinity, the divisions it fosters in the form of sexism and homophobia are unlikely to be challenged.

Skelton (2000) shows that football in particular is regarded as an “all-male” preserve and that the type of maleness boys are expected to exhibit is closely defined in terms of sexuality, namely heterosexuality. She cites studies where football is a potential forum for homophobic behaviours and attitudes, such as Kenway and Fitzclarence’s (1997) work on hegemonic masculinity in relation to violence and misogyny within the school system where sport is used as one means of legitimate violence to establish dominance and subordination among groups of boys. She also cites Connell (1995), who illustrates that hegemonic masculinity is exulted through competitive sport and that sporting competence tends to be viewed by most boys as a test of this form of masculinity.

Just as hegemonic masculinity is considered desirable and a “natural” trait of manhood *per se*, so too is organised sport considered a fundamental aspect of society, especially as it is a primary mechanism through which this masculinity is fostered and displayed. If football could be considered the secular religion of a nation, then hegemonic masculinity would easily be one of its treasured “holy grails” (Burgess et al., 2003; Connell, 2008). While conventional sport propagates this institutional masculinity, the institution of sport remains resistive to challenge. In fact, it might be able to accommodate unconventional representations of masculinity so long as they conform ostensibly to its more obvious features. Wellard (2002) makes this point in relation to Ian Roberts, the only male to ever come out in any Australian football code. He states that he is accepted by the media because his masculinity is not “compromised” by his stated homosexuality (Wellard, 2002, p. 240). As a player, his above average size, strength and aggression were the traits of the “conventional” rugby player, the traits of a valued masculinity, and were not “tainted” by effeminacy. Since his presence and performance did not deviate from that of the conventional player, his homosexuality was not perceived as a threat to conventional masculinity within the confines of popular team sports.

This theme is reflected in Roberts’ biography *Finding Out* (Freeman, 1997), in which he states that during his early years at school it was always the “little guys” who were targeted as being “sissies”. In his own words: “There was this whole thing that big guys can’t be gay, only small or sissy guys” (cited in Freeman, 1997, p. 31). This is yet another reflection of the conventional wisdom of the supposedly clear dichotomy between the professional team athlete and the typical gay man. The

former is distinguished by, among other traits, size and physical strength, while the latter is perceived as physically weak and overtly effeminate. Such conventional stereotypes appear to be entrenched within traditional sporting culture. For example, Woog (1998, 2002) found that many of his subjects did not initially consider themselves as gay since they did not conform to or identify with the negative stereotypes of gay males presented in the popular media; specifically, they did not consider themselves as effeminate or “feminine” men. As Woog’s (2002) study comes more than a decade after Roberts’ experience, it reflects how negative stereotypes of the gay male are deeply entrenched in modern society and suggest why mainstream sport appears to be incompatible with the overtly homosexual male.

Following his playing career, Roberts explored other avenues within mainstream media such as acting in films and television, even appearing on programmes such as *Dancing with the Stars*. The latter perhaps is the most significant deviation from his previous public persona as a rugby star. His acting roles as an ex-rugby star (*Little Fish*), bodyguard (*Underbelly: A Tale of Two Cities*) or criminal henchman (*Superman Returns*) appear as extensions or variations of this previous persona (Roberts, 2005; Singer, 2006). While his roles have largely been minor, it is significant that they tend to build on or reflect the hegemonic masculinity of the sporting field. In the case of Roberts and various other openly gay athletes, conforming to this version of masculinity appears to be a prerequisite to broader social acceptance.

Indeed, other studies show how the homosexual male can be co-opted into an image of hegemonic masculinity. King (2009) cites the example of US rugby player Mark Bingham, an openly gay male who came to be hailed as a hero in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US. She shows how the media in the US created this hero status by stressing all the traits he shared with a white middle-class, athletic male in a position of power. The fact that he conformed to many of the “desired” characteristics of modern capitalist society including the traits of hegemonic masculinity elevated him to the status of a hero and guardian of American values. He was seen as a true patriot and even lauded as a casualty of America’s “War on Terror”. Had he been a more stereotypical gay man in the sense of displaying more effeminate traits, he would not have achieved this notoriety. His example shows how hegemonic masculinity is valued above other forms of

masculinity and that in certain circumstances it can become a badge of respectability even for gay males.

The examples of Mark Bingham and Ian Roberts reflect how significant hegemonic masculinity is to team sports. It seems that acceptance as an openly gay male in such team sports is contingent to some degree on conformity to this particular masculinity. In fact, the more a gay man conforms, the more he is accepted as “one of the team”. By conforming in this manner, hegemonic masculinity is reinforced.

Ostensibly, it would seem that little has changed within the ranks of professional team sports apart from the fact that now openly gay men are present, even though their numbers are comparatively small. While this implies that professional sport remains largely unaffected by the changes wrought by the gay rights movement, recent studies suggest more subtle changes are occurring in the way contemporary young men engaged in amateur team sports view their masculinity and sexuality. This research is discussed in the next section with reference to some recent developments in professional team sports in the US.

3.6 From Homophobia to Inclusive Masculinity

Over four decades, the gay rights movement and subsequent queer rights activism have had noticeable effects on the concept of masculinity as gay men have become more visible across a range of social institutions and professions (Aldrich & Wotherspoon, 2001; Stern, 2009). Legal reforms such as equal opportunity protection and decriminalisation would not have been possible without changes in public opinion resulting in greater tolerance and even acceptance of homosexuality *per se*. Given the period of time since the advent of gay liberation and the generational change that has occurred, the influence of gay/queer activism can be discerned even in institutions where hegemonic masculinity has dominated, such as the military and exclusively male arenas such as professional football.

There do not appear to be any specific academic studies on the topic of homophobia among professional AFL players. However, there are specific studies on homophobia within the context of amateur football codes such as soccer and rugby in both Britain and the US. Comparatively recent studies such as Anderson (2011a), Adams (2011) and Anderson and McGuire (2010) have examined the attitudes and

practices of amateur team sportsmen at tertiary campuses in both Britain and the US, and show a clear consistency among their results. Significantly, these studies reflect a clear decline in misogyny and homophobia. These researchers also found that there were no openly gay or bisexual males on any of these teams. The seemingly progressive attitudes observed and reported were not the result of specific role models on their respective teams. The studies found that these more enlightened attitudes are the result of experiences from their broader social culture. One of the subjects in Anderson's (2011) study of soccer players made a salient observation when he compared the social attitudes of his generation and that of his parents, noting a parallel between the growing acceptance of gay males today and the previous generation's acceptance of black people. Just as the decline of racism was once seen as a measure of progressive social change, in contemporary society, the extent of homophobia has become a measure of social tolerance.¹

In another study Anderson (2011a) compared the coming-out experiences of two groups of 26 athletes a decade apart. He found that these experiences (explored throughout this thesis), were significantly more positive for those who came out a decade later. For example, the latter group did not fear coming out in the same manner or to the same degree as the earlier group; they did not fear that it would result in consequences such as physical hostility or social exclusion, either on or off the field. Furthermore, these athletes found a greater acceptance of their sexuality and, significantly, talked frequently about their sexuality with their teammates. In addition, they were less often subjected to derogatory terms among their peers such as "fag" and "that's so gay".

While Anderson (2011a) readily acknowledges that a complex set of variables have contributed to the difference between the two sets of findings, he acknowledges that homophobia seems to have decreased significantly among the groups of athletes studied. While acknowledging that the latter sample might have had more supportive peer networks and more socially inclusive communities, Anderson suggests that the overall consistency of results suggests a more inclusive

¹ I can cite an interesting example from my own experience as a university student in the mid 1980s

society overall.

From this research, Anderson (2011a) posits a theory complementary to hegemonic masculinity, namely inclusive masculinity theory. In examining what occurs on a macro level when homophobia decreases significantly, it augments the existing theory of hegemonic masculinity. Moreover, inclusive masculinity is non-hierarchical in structure: it acknowledges that various forms of masculinity can co-exist and have relatively equal social value. Under these conditions, conventional hegemonic masculinity actually loses its dominance and less oppressive forms of masculinity emerge without necessarily being dominant. Anderson (2011a) elaborates that within the theory of hegemonic masculinity, one archetypal form of hegemony is replaced by another. However, according to Anderson, it does not adequately explain the alternate masculinities that appear to emerge with the significant decline of homophobia within contemporary society. Anderson refers to these emerging forms of masculinity collectively as inclusive masculinity.

Anderson (2011a) further speculates that in a culture that is virtually free of publicly expressed homophobia, men's "homohysteria" is greatly reduced. Anderson (2010; 2011a) defines the term of "homohysteria" as a heterosexual man's fear of being publicly labelled as homosexual. This labelling arises from violating the social boundaries of what constitutes heterosexual male conduct within the public sphere. However, with the decline of homophobia throughout modern society, these once rigid boundaries are more flexible, and heterosexual men and boys are able to engage in a more diverse range of behaviours, which would previously incur homosexual suspicion and stigma. These behaviours no longer threaten their heterosexual identities since the gay man is no longer the social outcast he once was.

That a more inclusive masculinity is emerging might be reflected in recent events in the US. In April, 2013, an article appeared on the Outsports website² (Zeigler, 2013) detailing the plan of a college student, Alan Gendreau, to try out for the National Football League (NFL). The article reveals that should he succeed, he would be the first openly gay player in that sport's history.

Another article (Dolak, 2013) clearly reflects the positive reaction of

² Outsports is a media company founded in 1999 by Cyd Zeigler Jr and Jim Buzinski. Its website regularly publishes articles on the gay sports movement. Among its many roles, it acts as a media watchdog and sports entertainment provider.

Gendreau's peers to his decision to come out. His teammates and coaches were supportive and he himself felt accepted in this most popular of US football codes. It is significant that he was out at the age of 16; he had already come to terms with his sexuality and come out to family friends and even his church group. This is reflective of the generational change brought about by the gay rights movement in general and the type of change cited in Anderson's (2011b) studies. At 23, it is clear Gendreau grew up in the post gay liberation age and his experience is reflected in that of amateur AFL player Jason Ball. In other words, Gendreau was out before his formal involvement with football. Although ultimately, his bid to join the professional ranks of the NFL was unsuccessful, it was still a historic first in that an openly gay player had officially attempted to join the major football code of the US.

At approximately the same time in the US, National Basketball Association player Jason Collins publicly came out (Agence-France-Presse, 2013). As the media reported, this was also a significant first in terms of professional gay athletes: he became "the first openly gay active male athlete in a major US team sport" (Williams, 2013, p. 86). Unlike others who have come out from the relative security of retirement, Collins chose to do so while still engaged in his professional career. His decision and the level of public support he received as a result of it show that traditional constructs of hegemonic masculinity are changing. Although at present Collins remains only one example, his very existence in the arena of popular team sports implies that masculinity is becoming more overtly inclusive of the gay man.

Conversely, while the numbers of openly gay professional team sportsmen remain relatively small, it would seem that traditional hegemonic constructs of masculinity still hold a clear if covert dominance in professional sport. While there has been significant change, especially in recent years, it would seem that this change is still on the periphery rather than the centre of this institution.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the historical and sociological context within which professional team sports has become a significant contemporary social institution. It has discussed factors that have converged over a period of roughly two centuries resulting in the popular position organised team sports holds in modern society.

It has shown that the role of institutional team sports is more than an issue of

mass entertainment or mere physical recreation. Sport has become—and remains—a mechanism to foster and promote hegemonic masculinity. The need for this particular role arose from the changes effected by industrialisation on patterns of work and family structure. A significant result of these changes was the removal of the paternal role model from the home as men sought work outside the domestic setting. As a result of this change, organised sport became important as an institutional substitute to the paternal role model in promoting the accepted, hegemonic masculinity of modern society.

The next chapter investigates how changing patterns of masculinity in the broader community are evident within exclusively or predominantly male institutions such as the military and professional team sports. It will examine whether and to what extent these changing patterns of masculinity have influenced the more traditional patterns of hegemonic masculinity.

Chapter 4: Exclusively Male Domains—The Military and Team Sports

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to examine predominantly male institutions such as professional team sports and the military in order to draw parallels between them in relation to the relative absence of the openly gay male. Since the military in countries such as the US and Australia for a long time had official policies of excluding the openly homosexual man, it is possible to track the changes that have led to the comparatively recent reversal of this policy in these countries. The example of the military may suggest trends or aspects that also apply to professional team sports, which do not appear to have had such official policies of exclusion.

The fact that openly gay men can now officially serve in the military in the US and Australia implies that masculinity is becoming more inclusive, at least in some sections of the armed forces. Furthermore, these observable changing patterns of masculinity may shed light on similar changes (or the lack of them) in professional team sports such as AFL and why gay men are completely invisible among its professional ranks.

This chapter explores the emergence of the openly gay man within exclusively or predominantly male institutions such as the military and organised team sports in nations such as Australia and the US. It begins with the common elements of these two institutions, namely the hegemonic masculinity they espouse. A key factor in this discussion is the repeal of military policies banning gay personnel. This is examined not only in the context of modern gay activism but within a broader historical context ranging from World War II to the present. The discussion concludes by comparing and contrasting the example of the military in relation to official policies on gay men with organised team sports such as the AFL.

4.2 Sport and the Military: Common Elements

Over four decades of gay and queer activism have had a noticeable effect on contemporary concepts of masculinity, which is observable in the contemporary military where hegemonic masculinity has long been dominant. Officially, gay men have been permitted to serve in the US military with the repeal of the “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” (DADT) policy by President Obama in 2011 (Hirshman, 2012). The repeal of this policy was the result of protracted lobbying and activism both within the military and by homophile movements. This activism extended over decades and saw various prominent activists, including former members of the military take an often vocal part (Lehmkuhl, 2006; McGowan, 2005; Shilts, 1993).

The example of the military reflects that the non-disclosure of homosexuality tends to be prevalent in mainstream institutions that are composed exclusively or predominantly of males and motivated by a particular prescriptive masculinity that espouses such values as competition, dominance and physical strength. The parallels in the culture of masculinity between the military and professional team sports have been cited by Anderson (2005a) and Pronger (1990). It is no coincidence that these two institutions promote a traditional form of hegemonic masculinity. Burstyn (1999) and Vasquez (2012) have shown that professional team sports were viewed as one of the practical training grounds for a career in the military. For example, Vasquez (2012) shows how the US military shaped American college football, which became one of the country’s most popular sports. In this association, masculinity became linked to nationalism and patriotism. In some instances, there are direct links between the military and the formation of specific, national team sports.

Anderson (2010) shows that official sporting bodies and the military have similar environments with such common elements as discipline, obedience, conformity, regimentation and clear hierarchies of command. In conforming to the norms of their particular sport, professional athletes may also limit their social contacts mainly to others involved in their sport. Athletes, like members of the military, tend to inhabit more “closed” social systems where much of their contact is with their peers (Anderson, 2010).

In the US context, sports such as college football were seen as a fitting

training ground for soldiers. For example, US military leaders believed that football: “built leadership qualities, inculcated discipline, sharpened aggressive instincts and taught its officers to react quickly under pressure” (Williams cited in Vasquez, 2012, p. 362). These desired traits of both the military and football reflect that both these institutions legitimate acts of physical violence. The link between sport and the military is highlighted by Pronger’s (1990) observation on the attitude towards physical violence common to both and the masculinity they promote as integral to their function. Nothing, according to this study, is manlier than making war, than killing one’s opponents. Violent combative team sports are the next best thing. Not only are they a metaphor for war-making, but also they offer the opportunity to hurt, maim or at least “take another man out (of the game)” (Pronger, 1990, p. 21).

Pronger (1990) cites this in the context of sports such as American gridiron football where there is extensive violent physical contact and injury to players. In this there are parallels to Australian national team sports such as rugby. It is evident that both sport and the military foster a type of masculinity to legitimate violence towards an opponent, whether it is a national enemy or an opposing team. There are clear historical and social parallels on the subject of overt homosexuality between high-profile team sports and the military. Significantly, both subscribe to a similar form of (hegemonic) masculinity, which tends to exclude and denigrate the gay male. As a consequence, it is only comparatively recently that openly gay participants have emerged in both of these institutions.

Since the military has had a publicly articulated policy of exclusion of the overt homosexual, it is possible to track the evolution of this policy and how it eventually was reversed. This process of largely overt social change offers insights into the gradual acceptance of the overt male homosexual within exclusively male institutions. This will be the focus of the next section.

4.3 The US Military Policy

For most of the twentieth century, the US military had a standard, official line on the exclusion of overt homosexuals. One of its high-ranking colonels of the 1960s put it succinctly: “The presence of homosexuals would seriously impair discipline, good order, morals and the security of our armed forces” (cited in Shilts, 1993, p. 65). This official position ignores the numbers of gay men who served throughout

the last century in its armed forces. As the twentieth century progressed during the post gay liberation era, this policy began to appear increasingly flawed and contradictory. At best, it could collectively be described as ambiguous and at worst hypocritical (Bourne, 2013; Shilts, 1993).

Bérubé (1990) in his landmark study of homosexuality in the US military during World War II effectively illustrates how the armed forces adopted various measures throughout this conflict to minimise any supposed negative effects of gay liaisons among its members. His work illustrates that homosexuals have long been members of the military. In examining the policies and practices of the US military throughout the twentieth century, he highlights the various contradictions and ambiguities of this institution regarding male homosexuality.

The example of the US military is significant in that it attracted much public debate over decades. In Australia and Great Britain, there was comparatively little adverse public reaction or even debate, and the decision to allow openly gay men into the armed forces was taken much earlier than in the US (Hirshman, 2012). For example, Australia removed the ban of gay men in the armed forces almost two decades before the US and “with relatively little public fuss” (Altman, 2013, p. 116).

By its very nature, the military fosters an environment where males are segregated from women for extended periods. In this context, it provides an environment where opportunistic same-sex relations can to occur. Despite this, the military establishment has long chosen to ignore the fact that overt, erotic attachments occur among its personnel. Until relatively recently, blanket prohibition of homosexual acts seemed to be the only official acknowledgement by the military (Bérubé, 1990; Shilts, 1993).

The ambivalence of the military to homosexual personnel was not fully exposed in the public realm until the gay rights movement began to question its discriminatory policies in the 1970s and demanded equality. A significant number of activists in this cause were former members of the military, such as Perry Watkins (Shilts, 1993), Leonard Matlovich (Stern, 2009), Reichen Lehmkuhl (2006) and Jeffrey McGowan (2005). Moreover, in the broader social context, it has emerged that the anti-gay rule could be politically expedient. For example, during World War II the need for soldiers often led to an easing of the official anti-gay policy (Bérubé,

1990).

Bérubé's (1990) study focuses mainly on how the US military treated the issue of homosexual service personnel during World War II. The military authorities sought effective screening techniques to exclude those who might be detrimental to the armed services and the overall war effort. It was felt that the medical profession—specifically the branch that dealt with disorders of the mind—was best suited to the task. According to Bérubé (1990), this role in the screening of suitable candidates for the military during wartime inevitably enhanced the prestige of psychiatry within both medicine and the general community. He illustrates that as homosexuality was deemed a psychiatric disorder at the time, the gay man was deemed officially unsuitable for service in the military.

Given the fact that gay men are not visibly different from other men, such an official policy was often difficult to enforce with any degree of accuracy. In the absence of signed confessions or photographic evidence, it is virtually impossible to police. As a result many gay men who concealed their homosexuality served in the military. Bérubé (1990) cites a number of such case studies.

The disparity between former official military policy and the reality of gay service personnel can be better understood within a broader social context—namely the previously widely held assumption that gay males were inherently “inferior” to non-gay males and that, as a result, they could not adequately perform or compete with them. While the main impetus for the repeal of the DADT policy grew from the advent of modern gay liberation, the US military had long struggled with the issue of gay personnel (Hirshman, 2012; Shilts, 1993).

Moreover, during periods of national emergency such as World War II, this official policy was not always enforced. For example, in areas where there were significant shortages of personnel, gay men could lead fairly unobtrusive lives and continue to serve in the military. For instance, Bérubé (1990) cites an example of a gay naval torpedo officer who frequently walked around the decks of his ship in bathrobe, hairnet and slippers. Normally such behaviour would not have been tolerated but because he was so proficient in his job and such officers were scarce, he had the support of the ship's captain.

Apart from labour shortages in essential areas, Bérubé (1990) cites another activity where the gay service man could express his sexuality albeit tacitly and by default. He explains that during this period the US military was generally reluctant to have its female officers—for the sake of their reputation—perform in official entertainment for troops. As a result of this policy, men regularly performed as women in organised entertainment, which clearly gave gay men an avenue to express their difference in sexuality albeit within the narrow confines of drag.

The contradictions of this military policy are not unique to the findings of Bérubé's (1990) landmark study, as they are reflected in other studies such as that of Bourne (2013).³ Furthermore, these two researchers cite other instances where men who were ostensibly heterosexual indulged in gay liaisons.

Given the fear of contracting sexually transmissible diseases, Bérubé (1990) states that some men chose to engage in gay sex with their fellow servicemen rather than visit local brothels. Apparently, the military's hygiene films were both unpleasantly graphic and exclusively heterosexual, leading many servicemen to conclude that homosexual sex offered some form of protection. While such views can be attributed to the relatively widespread ignorance of sexual matters of the time, other factors of military life of the period seem to have contributed to homosexual activity among troops such as the frequent isolation of groups of men in hostile and life-threatening environments (Bérubé, 1990).

Apart from such specific and inaccurate fears, in many instances, men were isolated with their fellow recruits for extended periods and often under very stressful circumstances. In these cases, sexual activity was often a form of emotional release and their only source of comfort, reassurance and affection with their fellow combatants (Bérubé, 1990). No doubt, this activity was not unique to the armed forces of World War II but the sheer numbers of World War II servicemen—in the

³ These examples show that the nocturnal assignations of men such as Quentin Crisp were not the isolated occurrences of an eccentric celebrity. Crisp was openly gay from the 1930s and lived in London during the Blitz. He details his liaisons with US servicemen in his autobiography *The Naked Civil Servant* (1985).

millions—implies that it would have occurred on an unprecedented scale.⁴

As a result of this largely invisible presence for most of the military's official history, it is only comparatively recently that the military has been willing to acknowledge the facts of the hitherto largely covert existence of the gay serviceman or that such information has become widely available to the general public. For example, Bourne (2013) cites a number of heroic servicemen whose homosexuality remained concealed from the public for decades. This research into World War II shows that gay men were active at all levels of the military areas. However, at the time and long after, their presence was effectively concealed. History shows that gay men were also active in non-combatant roles. Perhaps the most impressive example is that of British mathematician and computer science pioneer Alan Turing (Cook, 2011a). His skill as a cryptographer led to the cracking of the Enigma code used by the Nazi military, which, in turn, greatly contributed to the Allied victory. However, his personal contribution to the war effort was never fully acknowledged during his lifetime: as an openly gay man, he did not conform to the contemporary image of the war hero (Leavitt, 2006). The military has long preferred to overlook the contributions of its gay personnel while simultaneously taking full advantage of them. As a result of this ambivalent stance, gay men have long enjoyed (or suffered) a rather ambiguous status in the armed forces of many modern nations.

The ambivalent and contradictory stance of the US military continued well after World War II. The example of army recruit Perry Watkins is a case in point (Shilts, 1993). Watkins was drafted into the army in 1968 (just prior to the Nixon presidency), despite stating his homosexuality on his enlistment papers and never making any attempt to conceal it. During his first six months in the army, he requested discharge three times as a result of the abuse he received from his peers, which included at least one attempted rape. Each time his request was denied. In addition, Watkins performed as a female impersonator under the name "Simone" in his spare time. At one point, a commanding officer asked him to perform for troops on bases both in the US and overseas.

⁴ During the early 1980s while doing a gay counselling course, I encountered a World War II veteran. He informed me that during his war service, there were many occasions for opportunistic sexual encounters with fellow troops. Once the war concluded and they returned to civilian life, most of these men subsequently contracted conventional marriages. His experience of the army is consistent with the examples cited by Bérubé (1990).

Shilts (1993) illustrates that as an openly gay man in the military, Watkins continued to suffer discrimination, which appeared to peak during the Reagan presidency. When Watkins required a security clearance for a promotion to the rank of sergeant, it was denied by the military hierarchy on the grounds of his homosexuality and the fact that he had performed as a female impersonator. When Watkins contested this decision, the military hierarchy attempted to discharge him on the grounds of his homosexuality. After more than a decade of service, his security clearance was revoked by the military and after five years of court battles, he received a dishonourable discharge. However, he appealed this decision all the way to the US Supreme Court and was successfully reinstated. He left the military with full retirement benefits and an honourable discharge. It took a very protracted legal struggle for this openly gay man to win his basic rights as a serving officer of the US army. The case of Perry Watkins highlights the contradictions and ironies of the military's anti-gay policy, which clearly could be expedient as circumstances and political regimes changed. As with most social institutions, the military could deal with the gay man as long as he remained in the closet and the issue stayed invisible.

The overwhelming irony of gay men in the military is captured by the words of one of the first men to challenge the military's policy of automatic discharge of homosexuals. Leonard Matlovich was the first to legally challenge his discharge from the US Air Force in 1975. His epitaph reads: "When I was in the military, they gave me a medal for killing two men and a discharge for loving one" (Stern, 2009, p. 306). It encapsulates an extreme expression of hegemonic masculinity, where conflict, aggression and dominance supersede any form of physical intimacy.

The incompatibility of homosexuality with the military was also revealed in representations of servicemen in popular fiction. In 1953, the popular novelist Mary Renault (1986) published *The Charioteer*, a landmark novel set during World War II. It is significant for its frank and compassionate portrayal of male homosexuality. All the primary characters are gay and nearly all are active members of the armed forces. This depiction of gay servicemen during wartime made it controversial, especially in the US. In fact, it took six years for the novel to be published there, a sign of the political conservatism in the US in the post-World War II era.

Renault's biographer (Sweetman, 1994) explains this delay in publication by speculating that US publishers feared public reaction to such a work where the male

military persona was tainted by the then perceived “perversion” of homosexuality. According to Sweetman (1994), it seemed unpalatable that the image of the brave army recruit could be associated with what was then not only classified as criminal behaviour but also a psychiatric illness: this military embodiment of hegemonic masculinity was not to be corrupted by homosexuality, even in a work of fiction in the US of the 1950s.

The experience of the gay serviceman in the US military was similar to that of other modern nations such as Australia. However, there were some notable differences. Perhaps the most significant is that formal acceptance of openly gay military personnel occurred some 20 years earlier in Australia than in the US. In the next section, I outline the Australian military policy in relation to openly gay men.

4.4 The Contemporary Australian Military

Gay individuals have been permitted to serve openly in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) since 1992 (Cook, 2010). Moreover, in 2013, they were permitted to march in the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in full uniform for the first time (Wearne, 2012). The television coverage of this event showed dozens of individuals from all three branches taking part in the parade (“*ABC 7.00pm News*,” 2013) When openly gay individuals were officially accepted in the Australian military, there was comparatively little of the overt lobbying and public debate that characterised the issue in the US. In fact, there was comparatively little adverse publicity to this change within the mainstream media at the time (Altman, 2013). The measure was adopted as part of the then government’s commitment to policies of non-discrimination and equal opportunity, which ended the ADF’s ban on openly gay people serving in the military (Cook, 2010).

Despite these changes in official policy, there still appears to be some ambivalence within the ADF regarding openly gay personnel. In a segment on the ABC current affairs program *The 7.30 Report* (Cooper, 2013), a long-serving, gay member of the army, Paul Morgan, broke ranks with his superiors to speak out against the victimisation he and others had suffered within the army. He described how authorities were generally reluctant to act against homophobic victimisation and did not appear to take such allegations seriously (Dorrington, 2013).

As the testimony of only one individual, it could be dismissed as an exception

in an otherwise accepting environment. However, when considered in the light of the recent public controversy over sexual misconduct within the Australian military, his complaints reflect a distinct undercurrent of misogyny and homophobia within this institution (Butterly, 2012). Various newspaper articles revealed that a culture of sexual abuse of both sexes has persisted and hitherto been concealed for many years within the military (Catanzaro, 2012). It would seem these negative elements have deep roots within the ADF, suggesting that the openly gay military person still needs to deal with a latent and often concealed misogyny and homophobia.

The situation articulated by serviceman Paul Morgan (Dorrington, 2013) may be the result of generational change in terms of the gay rights movement and its effects on contemporary society. The senior ranks of the military are likely to be composed of men who grew into adulthood during a period when alternate sexuality was not readily discussed in the public arena. As a result, they might have more conventional views on matters of gender and sexuality. Conversely, much younger recruits (such as those who marched in the Pride Parade in uniform for the first time) will have matured in a more sexually tolerant climate. Indeed, the experience for some might have been such that they never had to come out while serving in the first place if they had joined the military as already openly gay personnel.

The disparity between these two positions—of the new gay recruit and the older gay veteran—reflects the massive social change regarding gay issues over the past 40 years. The gay movement has not only secured gay rights in a number of areas, but has also questioned conventional definitions of masculinity. By becoming much more visible across a range of institutions, gay men have challenged the nature of hegemonic masculinity and, as a result, made it more inclusive. In this context, gay activism, in its various forms over the decades since the Stonewall riots in 1969, has resulted in a more inclusive definition of masculinity. In the next section, I develop this discussion further by examining some parallels between the military and the AFL in terms of the openly gay male in contemporary society.

4.5 Parallels Between the Official Policies of the Military and the Major Football Codes

Paul Morgan's issues with the Australian military mirror the concurrent disagreement between aspiring, amateur footballer Jason Ball and AFL chief

executive Andrew Demetriou over the relative merits of a proposed Pride match (Walsh, 2012). These differing viewpoints may reflect the generational change between the executive hierarchy and a young, aspiring player. Both Jason Ball and Paul Morgan claim that more needs to be done to support the gay man in the institutions of professional football and the military respectively. Conversely, the senior hierarchy of these institutions claim they are doing enough to promote gay issues and gay visibility (Cooper, 2013).

A clearly articulated and blatantly enforced policy of exclusion such as the US military's DADT policy overtly delineates the parameters of homophobia within that institution. Conversely, where an institution does not articulate or advocate such discriminatory policies, it may still be imbued by subtle and pervasive homophobia. There may be undercurrents that are never overtly articulated. Once homophobia is codified in this manner, it is thrust into the public arena and provides a stimulus for action by those who feel marginalised by it.

Since there do not appear to be any official policies of exclusion of gay men in the major football codes, it is much more difficult to discern homophobic discrimination within these institutions. The example of the military in the US reveals that where there is an overt discriminatory policy, there is the impetus to organise against it. This action takes various forms, both internal to that institution by those directly affected within its ranks and external to it by those who aspire to be part of it but are banned. In this sense, individuals lobby for change within the organisation and from outside. Conversely, when an institution has no such official policies of exclusion, it can be difficult to assess or even speculate on whether such discrimination is occurring. The fact that neither the AFL nor the NFL has no (and never appear to have had any) official policies of exclusion makes it difficult to monitor changes of homophobic attitude within these institutions. Furthermore, it is difficult to organise a lobby group around a cause that is not clearly articulated.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the parallels in terms of hegemonic masculinity within two institutions of modern society: the military and professional team sport, specifically the AFL. It revealed that until relatively recently, the military in both Australia and the US had official policies of excluding openly homosexual

personnel. This change in official military policy was a result of the modern gay rights movement that rejected views of gay men as somehow inferior and thus incapable of functioning levels of efficiency equal to heterosexual personnel. It has shown that these policies were overturned as a result of persistent lobbying. While the change in policy was a protracted struggle over many decades in the US, it occurred two decades earlier in Australia without the same degree of overt, political activism.

While both the military and professional football codes promote the same form of hegemonic masculinity, only the military has had a clearly articulated and enforced policy of exclusion regarding openly gay men. Conversely, professional football codes such as the AFL do not appear to ever have had any such official policies of exclusion. This may explain the lack of any overt lobbying on the part of gay players for recognition within the AFL. For them it may not appear to be an “issue” as such and any homophobic prejudice may not be clearly articulated within its ranks.

The next chapter will focus on the AFL and aspects of its portrayal in the mainstream media. Specifically, it will examine the more public aspects of some of its popular players. It will discuss how the sexual and other misdemeanours of these players are portrayed in the media and analyse these portrayals in relation to issues of masculinity and sexuality.

Chapter 5: Media Scandals

5.1 Introduction

Given sport's and particularly AFL's standing in popular Australian culture, it is not surprising that it tends to be viewed as a consistently positive institution and that its talented participants are revered as stars and heroes. For example, it is seen as an integral part of contemporary Australian society promoting not only physical fitness but also certain supposedly masculine values. Given the ubiquitous nature of the coverage of this particular football code, it is portrayed as a fundamental aspect of our modern culture and the version of masculinity it promotes is tacitly assumed to be the inevitable result of a progressive "natural order" of human development.

The privileged social position of professional football and the masculinity it espouses suggests its players derive certain social advantages compared to males who are not associated with it. The popularity of the major football codes ensures that at least its more talented players achieve a certain public notoriety in the mainstream media.

This chapter will examine the masculinity and sexuality presented in the media coverage of recent controversies in professional football. It will identify patterns in this reporting that are consistent with the hegemonic masculinity discussed in preceding chapters and speculate on the implications this has for homosexual men with professional football. By doing so, it aims to provide insights into the relative advantages (and disadvantages) of hegemonic masculinity within football culture. The chapter examines this media portrayal in light of specific researchers' analyses of hegemonic masculinity and its attendant heterosexuality. These researchers focus primarily on conventional depictions of gender and sexuality within the context of mainstream media's reporting of sexual misdemeanours by popular AFL players. This chapter will examine how this research helps explain the continued absence of the gay professional footballer.

Firstly this chapter presents some recent controversies concerning prominent AFL players and how these have been portrayed within the mainstream media in

terms of conventional stereotypes of gender and sexuality. Then it discusses the homoerotic aspect of the AFL as an exclusively male institution. It explores how the AFL and even the mainstream media itself present this aspect and possible reasons why this homoeroticism is rarely if ever acknowledged.

5.2 The National AFL and the Media

The establishment of a national competition within the AFL in recent decades has enhanced the standing of this code: the competition has been extended beyond that of local teams within a state to that of state teams within a national competition in which games are regularly played in various states. This has meant increased media coverage of state-based teams. As a result, the popular players of these state teams have become known nationally, whereas their predecessors and counterparts in the regional, state competition tend not to be as well known outside of their particular state. This birth of a national AFL competition has resulted in greater media attention for the game in general and of its more popular players in particular. A significant part of this scrutiny has entailed the personal indiscretions of such players. The tabloid media has brought many of these private *faux pas* into the public domain. These include sexual assault, group sex and the sexual exploitation of women.

In recent years, these indiscretions have been regularly covered in the popular media to the extent that some of them have taken on the semblance of episodes in a football soap opera with its players becoming the alternatively famous and infamous stars. In some instances (e.g. Brendon Fevola and Ben Cousins), these media “sagas” have extended over several years. A comparatively small number of these media scandals and controversies have been the subject of academic research in peer-reviewed journals. The specific topics covered include marital infidelity (Lonie & Toffoletti, 2012), group sex and alleged sexual assault (Hindley, 2005; Waterhouse-Watson, 2009), as well as misogyny and gender-based violence towards women (Mewett & Toffoletti, 2008; Toffoletti, 2007).

Complementing such academic research, there is a large amount of historical and biographical information on the AFL. This reflects the popularity of the sport among the general public. Besides compilations of statistics on the facts and figures of its individual players and matches over many years (Ross, 1996), there are numerous biographies on current and former players such as Cousins (2010),

Akermanis (2010) and James Hird (2007), and histories of famous teams and clubs.

While not all members of Australian society attribute great importance to AFL or even to sport, it cannot be denied that commercial sport in the form of AFL is a major institution of Australian popular culture coverage. This is reflected in the match attendance figures, media coverage of major games, and generous amounts involved in player salaries and television rights (Hess, 1998). The amounts of money involved reflect the popularity of the game in Australia both in terms of merchandising—the use of AFL teams’ names as brands on items as varied as gym towels and bar fridges (S. Butler, 2013)—and, more significantly, in terms of the salaries paid to its most successful and skilful players and senior executives. For example, when Andrew Demetriou announced his resignation as AFL CEO, it was announced that his pay packet for the previous year was \$3.8 million (Thompson, 2014) and that the AFL revenue in 2013 was \$446.5 million (Duffield, 2014). In October 2013, the Sydney Swans announced a contract to then Hawthorn player Lance Franklin amounting to \$10 million over a period of nine years (Jancetic, 2013). At the time, this set a record for an AFL player’s salary.

5.2.1 Media celebrity.

The rise of the professional footballer and the attendant media celebrity has inevitably led to a greater scrutiny of their exploits, both on and off the playing field. In recent years, there have been numerous media scandals concerning footballers of various codes throughout the country. Generally, these scandals comprise two broad categories: substance abuse and sexual (exclusively heterosexual) indiscretions (including infidelity, promiscuity, group sex and alleged rape).

Some of these reported indiscretions have been isolated occurrences, while others have been more protracted, focusing on popular players such as Ben Cousins (Adshead, 2010a; Casellas, 2007; Parker & Duffield, 2012) and Brendon Fevola (Emery, 2010; Hurst & Cooper, 2009; Morton, 2011), and extending over several months or even years. This extensive coverage has attracted some academic analysis. While these analyses do not specifically refer to homosexuality, at least one of them (Hindley, 2005) hints at possible reasons for gay invisibility within the AFL. This allusion is perhaps most significant when the matters in question are examined in a feminist context.

All of the researchers I refer to in this chapter are feminists, academics or female sports writers who tend to view the issues presented not as isolated occurrences or individual issues but as part of a broader social issue or culture within the context of the AFL institution. They also highlight that certain aspects of football culture are rarely examined by the media; for example, Mewett and Toffoletti (2008) examine the reactions of female AFL fans to alleged misconduct by players, a topic rarely covered within the mainstream media.

A significant factor that such studies highlight is that the media coverage of these alleged indiscretions tends to focus on rather conservative gender roles. A relevant example is the media scandal that linked former AFL player Brendon Fevola and model Lara Bingle (Franklin, 2012). It revolved around the publication of a nude photo of Bingle, presumably taken by Fevola with whom she was having an “illicit” relationship at the time. The publicity value of this scandal was compounded by the fact that Bingle was then engaged to Michael Clarke, captain of the Australian cricket team at the time. Lonie and Toffoletti (2012) analysed the media commentary on this particular event and showed that overall Bingle was chastised for her behaviour rather than Fevola who was married at the time.

In addition, Bingle was objectified through the publication of the original image, as issues of her privacy and consent were secondary to the publicity generated by a very newsworthy story. Lonie and Toffoletti (2012) draw attention to the phenomenon of sexting, the distribution and publication of sexually explicit photos of an individual who often has little or no control over the dissemination of such images. Their study highlights how it is commonly women who suffer the violation of their privacy as in the case of Bingle where it was deemed an inevitable consequence of her celebrity status by some media commentators.

A further relevant point made by Lonie and Toffoletti (2012) was to do with the media treatment of Michael Clarke, Bingle’s then fiancé. When he left a tour of New Zealand to return to Australia as a result of the adverse publicity, he was chastised by various sections of the media and even other former test cricketers for failing in his professional duty as part of the Australian test cricket team (Rolfe, 2013). Apparently, the priority should have been his sporting commitments rather than a major issue in his personal life. According to this stance, issues of emotional commitment are secondary to one’s status and public commitments as a professional

sportsman. Indeed, Lonie and Toffoletti (2012, pp. 4-5) suggest that these portrayals not only depict him as a failure as a cricketer but also question his masculinity: the assumption being that a “real” man is not distracted from his significant endeavours by comparatively “trivial” matters such as emotional attachment. This study reflects that conventional gender roles are still dominant within the context of media reporting on sexual indiscretions concerning high-profile sportsmen. Whatever the changing, societal trends within its audience in general, the popular media tends to present men and women according to distinctly traditional stereotypes.

In other words, men are basically the providers and protectors for their partners and families while women are the homemakers. Under this scenario, women tend to be the passive members of relationships and support their partners sporting careers. To be anything other than this is to transgress the stock role that convention has ascribed them. In this context, Bingle was chastised for having a liaison with a married man. The fact that this was a consensual relationship was of secondary importance as, according to the tone of the media coverage, it was allegedly unseemly for a single woman to conduct a liaison with a married man (Lonie & Toffoletti, 2012; Rolfe, 2013).

As other researchers have shown, this is not the only instance in popular sport where traditional gender roles hold sway. For example, Hindley (2005) cites the indiscretions of another AFL player Wayne Carey, who was vilified in the popular sports media for conducting an extramarital affair with the wife (Kelli Stevens) of a friend and fellow team member. In describing the reaction and general depiction in the popular media, Hindley (2005, p. 21) reveals a consistent pattern—this was not depicted as a consensual act between two adults but more as an act of treachery against a fellow team member.

Another fact noted by Hindley (2005) was the comparative absence of the “other” woman in the popular media coverage of this affair. In denying Kelli Stevens equal responsibility for this liaison, she was effectively denied a voice and seemingly any or significantly less choice than Carey in what occurred. Thus, she is rendered as more of a passive recipient in this relationship (Hindley, 2005, pp. 21-22).

5.2.2 Sexual assault scandals.

The conservative depiction of gender roles is not limited to this one study; it

extends to media coverage of more unsavoury matters such as sexual assault. For example, Hindley (2005) has examined the controversy of sexual assault and allegations of gang rape levelled against popular players of the major Australian football codes. Her analysis reflects the findings of subsequent studies such as Waterhouse-Watson (2009), which showed that a culture exists within these football codes which objectifies women and promotes certain negative excesses of hegemonic masculinity. According to Waterhouse-Watson (2009), this environment legitimates certain acts of aggression and violence as human bodies are viewed as weapons. Waterhouse-Watson (2009) elaborates that this codified violence towards opposing team members is extended towards members of the opposite sex where the sex act itself is viewed more as an act of conquest rather than in the context of an emotional relationship. In this sense it becomes an extension of the competitive nature of professional football itself.

Waterhouse-Watson (2009) elaborates that this legitimated violence is complemented by the view of male sexuality that this football culture espouses: one where men are seen to have a biological and uncontrollable sexual “need”. In this context, the sex act is primarily one of release; the priority is orgasm and ejaculation. Watson-Waterhouse (2009) describes this view of sex as “phallogentric”, where the male role is always that of the active penetrator. Thus, the female is inevitably seen as the passive receptacle of the male’s presumably uncontrollable instincts. In this context, there is greater likelihood of the woman’s wishes being subordinated and even ignored, which in turn provides the prerequisite for sexual assault.

As Waterhouse-Watson (2009) has shown, professional footballers are treated collectively as a distinct and favoured group whose status accords them privileges, even within the context of due legal process, which other males do not enjoy. Given this context, it is not surprising that public allegations of sexual assault by professional footballers are treated in a particular manner by the mainstream media. For example, Waterhouse-Watson (2009) suggests that the footballers’ revered status might be a factor in the failure of many incidents reaching court and for a general reluctance by police to even press charges in cases of allegations of sexual assault. Their privileges may extend intangibly beyond that institution, which explain why the private and not-so-private misdemeanours of players such as Cousins and Fevola are more readily tolerated than those of non-professional sportsmen.

In addition, the closed nature of bodies such as the AFL tends to promote a narrow concept of masculinity, where domination and elements of misogyny are clearly observable traits according to researchers such as Toffoletti (2007), Hindley (2005) and Waterhouse-Watson (2009). The prevalence of traditional gender stereotypes within the sporting media is also reflected in a study by Toffoletti (2007), who examined how gender-based violence is covered in the sporting news, allegations of sexual assault against AFL players. She identified common themes in the reporting of these alleged assaults in the sport sections of major newspapers such as *The Age* and *Herald Sun*. These themes favoured gender stereotypes that depicted female groupies as transgressors of “proper” femininity, which expects women to be passive but also heterosexually available to the virile young athlete. Conversely, the footballer is often depicted as a confused, young “innocent” who is vulnerable to the advances of the “predatory” female groupie in this unfamiliar and therefore “confusing” sexual landscape (Mewett & Toffoletti, 2008, pp. 168-169).

In this scenario, women who show sexual desire by any overt advance challenge the accepted “ground rules”. Therefore, their sexually “deviant” behaviours need to be publicly named as such and rendered inappropriate. This entire process of ascribing sexual deviance serves to protect male heterosexual privilege. As Toffoletti (2007) summarises:

Furthermore, the blame falls on women for subverting the “natural” state of sexual relations. Women who actively seek out footballers are held responsible for “provoking” them—the presumption here being that male sexuality is intrinsic and uncontrollable, and it is a woman’s responsibility to ensure she does not elicit male desire. (p. 433)

Significantly, Toffoletti (2007, pp. 435-436) found that articles written by female sports journalists in other media outlets tended to question the prevalence of such sexist stereotyping and looked at the social dimensions of this issue: they did not always view it merely as an “individual problem”. She also reveals that the football establishment tends to view incidents of sexual assault as isolated events contingent upon individual responsibility and therefore not as a systemic issue. Since the football hierarchy does not view the issue as a part of the institution’s culture, it is reluctant to undertake measures beyond specific educational programmes.

Similarly, Hindley (2005) shows that the pattern of responses by the AFL hierarchy to the various cases of sexual assault stems from a deeply ingrained institutional culture. Among the many factors contributing to this culture is the absence of women with any clear public role or authority. As Hindley (2005) points out; what is required is significant cultural change within the institution of professional football. She outlines how placing women in positions of authority in its executive hierarchy would counterbalance a culture that is patriarchal and performance-related. This clear gender hierarchy within the AFL is also noted by Toffoletti (2007), who found women were regularly assigned to subordinate and peripheral roles such as secretarial or clerical support positions. Toffoletti (2007) emphasises the negative aspects of the type of masculinity prevalent in professional football culture. This culture is inherently sexist and heterosexist in that it promotes male privilege and traditional gender roles.

5.2.3 WAGS of elite footballers.

Whenever women are the subject of media attention in professional football, generally, they are portrayed as WAGS (wives and girlfriends) in the traditional roles as supports to the professional player's career. This is clearly seen in the annual award ceremonies of the Brownlow and Sandover medals. Extensive coverage is given to the female partners of medal contenders, who are photographed in expensive designer gowns. Much is made of their couture and physical attractiveness. Scant mention is made of these women's careers or occupations unless they are also employed within the media or in a field such as women's fashion (Stoelwinder, 2013). It appears to be a prerequisite for a popular AFL player to have a young, slim attractive female partner, preferably with the allure of a fashion model or beauty queen. Within this context of a glittering awards ceremony, these women are clearly on show to the general public for their physical attributes. They are present because they are the partners of successful, professional footballers. For example, a local Sunday newspaper article on the 2013 WA Football Sandover medal awards ceremony in Perth was limited to descriptions of the WAGs designer clothes and other accoutrements such as jewellery and hairstyles (Parri, 2013). In this sense, they are the ultimate status symbol within an exclusively male institution—a decorative trophy for the deserving successful football star.

Conversely, the mainstream media do not give coverage to players who

attend such ceremonies on their own or with male companions. The popular media does not deem these occurrences as newsworthy. It is always assumed that the popular, successful, attractive footballer will also “win” an attractive female partner in the same vein as his team wins matches and he wins specific trophies. These are the privileges of hegemonic masculinity.

Generally, the women associated with AFL are portrayed in the media as the supporters and often attractive ornaments to any popular player’s career. In this sense, they can be viewed as a form of acquisition: a symbolic prize or trophy to which the professional footballer is entitled and which complements his image as the successful, competitive, virile, heterosexual male athlete. What researchers have highlighted in this context are clear elements of misogyny within football culture where women are devalued and objectified as instruments for the pleasure and social status of the professional player.

5.3 Elite Status of Professional Footballers

It is not merely women who are objectified within professional football: players themselves are also objectified but not in a sexually exploitative manner. Their skills are regularly assigned a monetary value. As a result of the commercial nature of this institution, players are commodities that are traded among teams according to financial priorities. Skilled and successful players have a high monetary value ascribed to their football talents. Financial remuneration is one aspect of the elite status of professional footballers, which begins with the recruitment process.

Hickey and Kelly (2010) show that the process of recruitment is a rather lengthy and often intrusive process that considers many aspects of a potential player’s situation. Given this process, it is not surprising that successful applicants would consider themselves as having reached an elite status within society, as a group or class apart from the rest of society.

The associations of enhanced physical prowess further intensify this elite status of the professional footballer. The footballer’s body is seen as more powerful and indestructible to that of other males in terms of its presumed ability to recover more swiftly from injury. As Waterhouse-Watson (2009) shows in the reporting of injuries, footballers are esteemed for continuing to play on even when injured. Moreover, the popular depiction of injuries tends to be objectified to the extent that it

promotes the view that serious injury is something that professional footballers do not experience. Their bodies are seen to be indestructible or at least much more prone to recovery than other males. The fact that they can continue in a match even when injured tends to support this view of indestructibility. Therefore, in addition to their status as sporting heroes and stars, they acquire the status of supermen whose bodies are “big, tough and indestructible” (Waterhouse-Watson, 2009, p. 117).

Similarly, it is common for players who continue their professional careers despite suffering a series of major injuries to be praised for their “commitment to the game” (Waterhouse-Watson, 2009, p. 121). The popular media never appears to question this course of action. For example, in a feature article on West Coast Eagle Mark Nicoski (S. Butler, 2011), to mark his one hundredth league game, much was made of his determination and commitment to the game despite a number of significant injuries. His persistence and tenacity were viewed as the highly admirable traits of an AFL player.

Similarly, an article by Rynne and Reid (2013) on Fremantle Docker Anthony Morabito commended him for choosing to undergo a third knee construction through specialist surgery in order to continue his playing career as quickly as possible (Duffield, 2013). That evening on the *ABC 7.00pm News* (March 3, 2013,), Morabito was described by his team captain Matthew Pavlich as “an inspiration to his teammates”. This same perspective was also present in an earlier, full-page article in *The West Australian* in which fellow players who had suffered similar injuries offered nothing but encouragement to Morabito to continue his football career (Rynne & Reid, 2013).

Significantly, there was no mention in any of these reports of any potential long-term risks to his mobility or negative consequences of repeated surgeries on the same knee joint. Moreover, there was never any hint that such action might be foolish or that his long-term physical health should take priority over league football. Indeed, there appears to be no form of reproach in the popular media towards players who take this course of action for the game. It appears to be insignificant that any major surgery carries with it potential risks; the status of professional footballer confers physical traits not shared by other “lesser” males. One of the perceived privileges of this form of hegemonic masculinity is a certain physical superiority in the form of relative indestructibility (Waterhouse-Watson, 2009, p. 123).

This perceived physical superiority could be viewed as a trait of a privileged masculinity, a clear aspect of hegemonic masculinity (as discussed in Chapter 3). Conversely, those males who do not share in this revered masculine status are not viewed as possessing such physical superiority. For a layperson outside of a sporting context to act in such a manner—to continue a task while seriously injured—might be viewed as foolish or reckless. However in the context of professional football, the popular press tends to detail—without significant reproach—the extent and frequency of the physical injuries a single player can and does suffer. This reporting tends to be couched in terms of “love of the game”, “loyalty” and “proving oneself”. The overall impression conveyed is that professional footballers are not “ordinary” males but somehow physically superior.

Even major injuries are presented as an unfortunate but inevitable risk of league football: there is no overt suggestion that a successful player not continue a career despite the risk of significant pain and discomfort. Such articles imply that professional footballers are somehow immune to the long-term effects of a succession of major injuries, which, in turn, seems to justify such acts of violence against the footballer’s body. It does not appear to be part of a player’s repertoire to question this form of violence since it is perceived as a legitimate part of the game.

In lauding the efforts of players who continue to play while injured and ignore the likely consequences of persistent physical damage to their bodies, the popular media implies that their bodies are somehow indestructible compared to the bodies of other men. As a result, their status as star players is further enhanced as “superhuman” athletes.

5.4 Homoeroticism

5.4.1 Bonding and group sex.

Hindley’s (2005) research into the sexual assault allegations against AFL players highlights another aspect of female objectification that is significant to this research. The scandals surrounding allegations of gang rape drew attention to certain practices in professional football codes, specifically those euphemistically referred to as team “bonding exercises” (Hindley, 2005, p. 28). Generally this entails the hiring of a sex worker or willing female groupie whose favours members of the particular team will enjoy on the same occasion and within close proximity to one another.

As with their on-field experience, the performance of a sex act where all the spectators are one's male peers is another form of competition among these men. It suggests that the public persona of the professional footballer extends, at times, even into aspects of his sexual relations. It reflects the dominance and control of hegemonic masculinity over the female body, thereby stressing the difference between the genders. According to Anderson (2010) and Pronger (1990), the homoerotic refers to the sexually suggestive banter and actions such as the touching of another's genitals by members of the same sex. In Hindley's (2005) research, homoeroticism can describe any mutual attraction short of the homosexual sex act itself. As Hindley (2005) explains, this form of team bonding can be the guise for a latent homoerotic intimacy: "when two men bond through a woman the intimacy shared is between them, not the woman; she provides the neutralizing of the homoerotic space. To the footballers her body is their—the footballers'—space" (p. 22).

By objectifying the woman in this sexual act, the footballers can enjoy the homoerotic in a covert manner. The fact that a woman is used for the bonding of team members implies that the sex act is primarily for the enjoyment of the male participants. The scenario is presumed to be that a group of young males are (presumably) naked, in close proximity to one another and observing one another's orgasms. Indeed, two team members may be copulating with the same woman simultaneously. The satisfaction comes not only from one's individual performance but also as a spectator of the other's performance. In other words, these acts are performed primarily for each other; the intimacy is shared between the males present and not the female who merely a convenient instrument for this form of bonding. Within this voyeuristic context, the woman serves another purpose: her presence negates any allegation or fear of homosexuality. As Hindley (2005) so concisely explains: "in private, it is an erotic sport with a performance, a viewing and an experience that enables the players to have a closeness that would otherwise be considered a betrayal of the homophobic culture of football" (p. 23).

In this context of group sex for team bonding, these males can enjoy the homoerotic without any threat to the conventional masculinity they overtly subscribe to. Their presence ensures a facade of heterosexuality to all those in proximity. For individual players, both publicly and in private, potential homosexuality is held "at bay". Whether the male participants acknowledge it or not, the woman becomes a

convenient instrument to sustain the myth of exclusive heterosexuality within the AFL. It seems a long-standing assumption that all expressions of sexuality are construed in terms of heterosexuality within AFL culture.

The popular media does not dwell on these circumstances of naked adult males reaching orgasm in close proximity to one another: it is always portrayed as an exclusively heterosexual act in the context of less conventional sexual practices. For example, in a number of newspaper articles on scandals involving collective nudity, group sex and team bonding, there is no mention of the homoerotic or of any sexuality other than heterosexuality (Shanahan, 2004; C Wilson, 2004; Yallop, 2004). None of the media commentary on team group sex activities appears to allude to any latent homoerotic element. Rather, it focuses on the fact that a number of professional footballers have indulged in group heterosexual sex where the issue of consent has been subsequently questioned by the woman involved (Shanahan, 2004; C Wilson, 2004).

In this way, the popular media colludes, whether consciously or not, in promoting a particular stereotype of masculinity. It depicts the sexual conduct or misconduct of popular footballers as nothing other than heterosexual. Even acts of group sex simultaneously involving several males are construed as nothing more than an overt expression of heterosexuality. Since the mainstream media fails to even hint at homosexuality in this context, it is perhaps not all that surprising that this same media does not allude to it in any other context concerning league footballers such as the banter associated with the change room. For the purposes of the popular media, the homoerotic is not only invisible, it is also non-existent (Hindley, 2005).

Significantly, a similar theme is noted by Mewett and Toffoletti (2008), who found that even among female AFL fans, there was a prevalent idea that players' actions towards women are just as much about status between men as they are about interpersonal relations between men and women. In this context, women are objectified as status symbols for the professional footballer just as they are portrayed as decorative ornaments to popular players at the awards ceremonies. Furthermore, the concepts of "rogue males" and "predatory women" tended to support the myth that when encouraged, such males are incapable of holding their biological drives in check. These attitudes hold to a heteronormative concept of male sexuality (Mewett & Toffoletti, 2008, p. 177). Within this concept, the homoerotic aspect of

professional football is not acknowledged let alone discussed.

While the homoerotic aspects of AFL culture are not overtly discussed within the mainstream media, this same media nevertheless still depicts them. The next section will examine this depiction in terms of homosexual symbolism and imagery.

5.4.2 Exclusively male environments.

Professional team sports by their very nature imply that players spend considerable time engaged in their chosen sport, both on and off the playing field. There are the formal requirements of training and actual matches as well as more informal sessions involving bonding and team solidarity. As a result, professional team sportsmen spend a significant amount of their time in the company of their peers and have ample opportunity to form various relationships in this context.

Pronger (1990) is one of the earliest researchers to allude to the phenomenon of homoeroticism in professional team sports. Pronger (1990) stresses the inherent irony of professional sport: while it promotes a particular form of masculinity that presumes heterosexuality, it also excludes women and celebrates “affinity among men” and therefore is a “paradoxical experience” (1990, p. 177). He explains that the homoerotic is a rather broad phenomenon that is not restricted to the physical sex act. He illustrates how it pervades the institution of sport and how its participants cope with what would be an “uncomfortable” reality by various forms of denial.

Anderson’s (2005b, 2010) analysis of the actions within team sports reflects the work of Pronger (1990). For example, he finds that a number of practices are common among professional team athletes, which, in other contexts, would be construed as homosexual advances, such as towel-snapping, wrestling, buttock slapping and even the grabbing of another player’s genitals.

Anderson (2005a); Anderson and McGuire (2010) also found that the more masculine and successful an athlete, the less likely would his sexuality be questioned. Indeed, this status based on hegemonic masculinity allows greater leeway to transgress rigid gender boundaries as it is much less likely that they would be challenged by other males within the team setting and thereby be relatively free to indulge in homoerotic play. Anderson (2010) cites a personal experience when a popular, athletic volleyball player attended one of Anderson’s university lectures in drag. This was met by cheers and acclamations for his bravery by his fellow

classmates. However, when an unknown and non-athletic student did the same in another semester, he was met with derision and avoidance.

Another way in which the homoerotic is present in sport is through team initiation rituals. Some of these ritual acts can have a distinctly sexual nature and on occasion even have a distinctly sadistic element. For example, Anderson (2005a) cites instances where certain team members were anally raped by the use of implements such as broom sticks. It is no coincidence that similar acts of rape have recently been exposed in the initiation rituals of the Australian military (Butterly, 2012), another institution where hegemonic masculinity is valorised. Anderson (2005a) cites psychoanalytic theories of fear and repression of one's own homosexual desires as an explanation for such acts. It is clear that the homoerotic element in such rituals cannot be overlooked as mere "fun" or "team high jinks". Anderson (2005a) shows how these acts have a covert role, apart from enhancing team solidarity and the respective loyalty of team members. They are always portrayed as acts that are beneficial to the team by espousing qualities such as individual loyalty and team cohesion, while the blatant homoerotic aspect is barely if ever, acknowledged. In this manner, they help contain and "sanitise" the homoerotic within an exclusively male environment.

Similarly, a recent Australian study by Symons et al. (2010) found that team sports such as football provide opportunities for intimacy and emotional expression that rarely exist outside of the sporting context. This study also highlights the tensions between homoeroticism and the homosocial environment of professional team sports, finding that homosocial affection and solidarity are central to male team sports and any non-conformity to perceived masculine ideals in the form of homosexuality is extremely difficult (2010).

5.4.3 Homoeroticism: tabloid coverage.

Even in the absence of any academic studies on the topic of the homoerotic and the AFL, it is easy to detect elements of homoeroticism in the way football is portrayed in the visual media. Newspaper coverage abounds with images of players in close proximity to one another. While the images in reality involve swift and often aggressive contact, when frozen in still photographs they acquire the elegance of slow-motion gymnastics or even ballet (Fig. 3).



Figure 3: Sports section of *The West Australian* (Forsaith, 2013, p.68).

On other occasions, images of AFL players can be more explicitly sexual. A few local instances of tabloid coverage illustrate this point. For example, in 1999 the winning team of the WAFL Grand Final was pictured in the sports section of the *Sunday Times* newspaper (Matts, 1999, p. 88) (Fig. 4). They are in what are presumably the team change rooms and huddled together so they can all be included in the shot. Clearly this in itself is not unusual; what is unusual is that each member of this winning team is completely naked. One can hardly think of another sport in Australian society where a winning team would be represented in a mainstream newspaper in this explicit manner.



Figure 4: Winning team after the WA 1999 Grand Final (Matts, 1999, p. 88).

The fact that this caused no noticeable public reaction suggests that such a representation is acceptable as part of AFL celebratory culture. In this football context, it is accepted that young males will find themselves stark naked in close proximity with one another, and they can readily be photographed doing so. It appears that such a celebration is completely acceptable within the context of winning the Grand Final.

Another more recent article (Parri, 2012) shows that nudity with other males is clearly acceptable even when not within a change room or celebratory context (Fig. 5). It shows a popular WAFL player with a group of four other males, all of whom appear to be completely naked apart from items such as protective headgear and gloves. They appear to be engaged in some form of mock home maintenance. Significantly, the tools they display are indicative of the blue-collar tradesman and reflect the active role of dominance and power aligned with hegemonic masculinity.



Figure 5: *Sunday Times* article (Parri, 2012, p. 38)

The accompanying article does not explain the purpose of the photograph and scarcely gives any clarification other than to state that neither the footballer in question nor the team manager were available for comment. Moreover, it is unlikely they would have been contracted to appear naked, as there is no product placement or mention of such in either the picture or accompanying article. They appear to be promoting merely themselves and their WAFL team. Such a photo illustrates that a popular footballer can be photographed naked with other young males and that it is generally viewed as a “bit of a joke”. Since footballers are regularly naked with their teammates, it appears acceptable that they can be naked with other males and, more significantly, be photographed doing so without any question of their sexuality.

A second example from the same newspaper (Fig. 6) a few years earlier shows another, more aggressive form of physical contact between two players (Coppel, 2008). On this occasion, it involves an on-field tackle. There is no nudity or celebratory context; what is presented is the “rough-and-tumble” of the game. The shot shows one player on his knees rather aggressively tackling another who is falling backwards as a result of it. What is noteworthy is the specific nature of the

tackle and that it is printed as a near full-page picture in the sport section. One player has grabbed hold of the opposing player at the base of his buttocks and his face is making full contact with the other player's genitalia. Appropriately, the picture is captioned *Pushovers*. Were these two players not in football garb, then the homoerotic implications of this picture would be difficult to ignore. The presence of the football uniform seemingly renders this tackle as just another part of the game and nullifies its homoerotic aspect.



Figure 6: *Sunday Times* photo (Coppel, 2008, p.41).

It is obvious that this particular contact is accidental and—as the facial expressions indicate—in a rather physically forceful context. It would seem that the

journalist or sports editor concerned did not consider the act overtly or even remotely sexual. It is also worth noting that such an act is unlikely to occur accidentally in other football codes and therefore less likely to appear as a near full-page illustration in the sports section of a local newspaper. These examples seem to confirm Anderson's (2005a, 2010) findings that males engaged in such activities have acquired sufficient "masculine capital" so as not to have their sexuality questioned.

A more blatant example of homoerotic behaviour occurred on prime time, national television on Channel 9's popular weekly programme *The Footy Show* in April 1997 (Silver, 1997) (Fig. 7). This media incident involved two former high-profile players: Sam Newman and Jason Dunstall. Prior to this event, it was evident that there was some friction between these two men during their exchanges in previous episodes. It began with Newman sitting in Dunstall's lap with one arm around him in an act of mock reconciliation. This was followed by an abrupt act on Dunstall's part, which seemed equally mocking but more controversial. Dunstall placed his hands on Newman's face to pry open his mouth and placed his own mouth with apparently his tongue protruding on Newman's mouth. As a result of this presumably spontaneous gesture, both men fell to the floor.

While not a common event on the programme, it was nonetheless seen as part of the rivalry and camaraderie among these former footballers, which comprises the comic and often-irreverent tone of the show. As a result, it was warmly applauded by the studio audience. Significantly, there was no suggestion or questioning of either man's heterosexuality. It was depicted in the context of a healthy rivalry between two men. Furthermore, the actual kiss might have been construed as an aggressive act since Dunstall appears to force his affections onto Newman. In this sense, it was an act of mock revenge or payback—one of humiliation rather than of implicit or explicit sexuality.



Figure 7. Behind The Footy Show (Silver, 1997).

Despite the farcical aspect of the event, Sam Newman still sought to distance himself from it: on the following episode, he joked that he had been sick for several days afterward (Silver, 1997). Although this act was done in jest and mock revenge, his remark emphasised that it was both atypical and, for him at least, extremely

unpleasant. Through humour, he affirms the act was unacceptable and thereby attempts to discount the homoeroticism that is evident in AFL football culture.

To what extent this act was rehearsed is difficult to gauge. However, there was clearly some complicity: adult men do not generally sit in the laps of other men without their cooperation. It is significant that this presumably spontaneous kiss was viewed as friendly rivalry, revenge and camaraderie; what would otherwise be considered a sexual and homosexual act can quite easily pass as a simple act of mildly outrageous fun on national, prime time television. All these examples enforce Anderson's (2010) claims that males who excel in such forms of masculinity are much less likely to have their (conventional) sexuality questioned. As a result of Newman's and others' achieved status, they are able to behave, even publicly, in less than conventional ways. Clearly, the reputations gained through a strong association with hegemonic masculinity accompany footballers beyond the AFL playing field. Such an example of mock homosexual behaviour highlights the ironies and contradictions of hegemonic masculinity in the professional team sports arena.

While the AFL generally chooses to ignore the homoerotic aspect of its game, it is not averse to using it for financial gain. For example, as far back as the 1980s its predecessor, the Victorian Football League (VFL), sought to use it to promote a newly established team, the Sydney Swans, whose promoters actively encouraged gay men to attend its matches (Vadasz, 1986). As part of this promotion, the team's star player (Warwick Capper, Fig. 8) was featured on the cover of the country's leading gay publication, *Outrage* magazine (Vadasz, 1986).

This example of soliciting a gay audience shows that the AFL is aware of the homoerotic aspect of its game but with a certain delineation: the overt aspects apply only to those males "outside" of the game such as its audience, not those males who are its public face. Under this premise, AFL players have only platonic relationships with one another. In this context, the full implications of the homoerotic are tacitly denied simply because they are completely ignored. This soliciting of a gay audience reflects the AFL's ambivalent and contradictory attitude towards the homoerotic. While it is acknowledged or rather displayed in often graphic imagery, it does not sit comfortably with the concept of masculinity espoused by this sporting institution (Hindley, 2005).

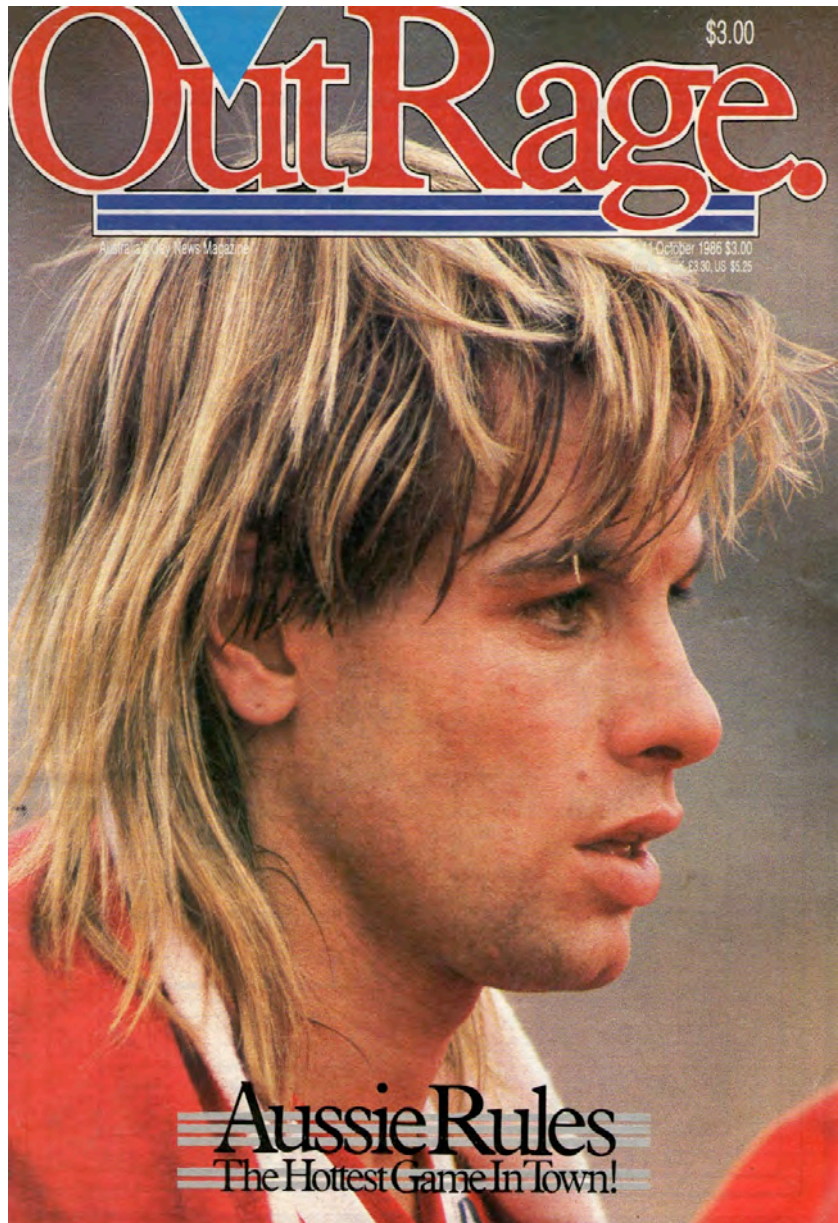


Figure 8: Front cover of Australian gay magazine *Outrage* in October 1986 (Vadasz, 1986).

Just as there is a certain culture within professional football pertaining to masculinity, there appears to be a similar culture within the mainstream media promoting this same masculinity when covering player issues.

5.5 Conclusion

The culture of the mainstream media tends to reflect the conservative constructs of masculinity and follows a tradition of media reportage in Australia on professional footballers. The more successful and skilled players are elevated to the

status of heroes and stars who earn various laurels and trophies. Within professional football, a certain type of masculinity is espoused, whose traits include physical strength and aggression, competitiveness and exclusive heterosexuality. The dominance of this form of masculinity is reflected in the popular media coverage, both positive and negative, of star players. Within any context concerning gender relations or any sexual misconduct, the matter is always presented within the context of heterosexual relations and acts (Webber, 2012). It appears that since no such “scandals” are ever reported by the popular media, they cannot be included in even an unofficial anthology for popular consumption.

This chapter has examined some recent controversies reported in the mainstream media involving popular AFL players, which have all been of a sexual nature concerning issues such as marital infidelity, group sex acts and alleged sexual assault. It has also discussed the homoerotic aspects of AFL culture primarily through various images presented in the mainstream media. It has illustrated that the media does not tend to allude to any homosexual context or implications of such homoerotic imagery. The acceptable context for any homoerotic banter between current or former players tends to be one of humour, mockery, friendly rivalry or camaraderie. The clear implications of erotic or sexual actions among professional players are rarely, if ever, acknowledged.

Within this scenario of exclusive heterosexuality, there is no role for the openly homosexual man. He remains completely invisible in a sporting culture that denies his existence on every level. As an institution, the AFL has a culture that is homophobic, in overt and covert ways. It presents itself and is presented by the popular media as composed of (and always having been composed of) exclusively heterosexual men at every level of its official hierarchy including all of its professional players (Mewett & Toffoletti, 2008).

The next chapter will examine significant media allusions to male homosexuality within the context of AFL since 2010. It will look at mainstream media articles that have commented on the issue of players being out or not out. In particular, it will cite the remarks of former AFL player Jason Akermanis on players remaining in the closet and the comparatively recent coming out of amateur player Jason Ball.

Chapter 6: Media Controversies and the Gay AFL Player

6.1 Introduction

In the past few years, there have been a number of controversies within the ranks of the AFL. Apart from the sexual scandals discussed in Chapter 5, issues such as racism and illicit substance abuse have received extensive media coverage. In some cases, substance abuse has been reported in the context of individual players such as Cousins (Parker & Duffield, 2012). In other instances, such as the Essendon supplements scandal (O'Donoghue, 2013a), an entire team and coach as well as other officials were implicated in performance-enhancing substance abuse. In addition, there have been admissions by current and former players of various personal traumas ranging from clinical depression (Pownall, 2012) to childhood sexual abuse (O'Donoghue, 2013b) and problem gambling (Morton, 2011).

This chapter examines media coverage of gay issues in relation to the AFL in the context of the thesis question: why are professional gay AFL players reluctant to come out of the closet? It speculates on the likely effects that such coverage may have on players who remain in the closet. Basically, it seeks to clarify whether this recent media reporting is likely to encourage or discourage the closeted gay AFL professional player.

The aim of this chapter is to provide critical analysis of mainstream media coverage of the topic of male homosexuality within the AFL since 2010. It examines the AFL in general—as a game played by amateurs and aspiring professional players—and in the context of those who comprise its professional ranks. The media commentary will be analysed with the context of sporting culture in general and of the AFL in particular. Specifically, it will examine aspects of the professional AFL that are significant for the gay player and are likely to affect his decision to remain in the closet or not. It will also speculate on potential measures that might encourage a gay player to come out.

6.2 Media Attention Since May 2010

Given that there are no openly gay professional AFL players, the tabloid

coverage regarding homosexuality has been less extensive and more intermittent than with other issues such as drug abuse and racism. However, since 2010, there has been discussion in the mainstream media about the lack of openly gay men in the AFL and of policies by that body, namely those of equal opportunity and inclusion. According to at least one current player (Bob Murphy), the prospect of an openly gay player would be a “non-issue” (Blake & Lynch, 2012, p. 50). In addition, there has also been one amateur player from country Victoria (Jason Ball) who has come out. As a result of his action, the fact that there are no out AFL players became a topic in itself in the mainstream media.

6.2.1 Jason Akermanis.

It is only relatively recently that the total absence of any openly gay players in the AFL was given any attention in the mainstream media. It was the comments of former AFL player Jason Akermanis (Walsh, 2010) on the topic that instigated widespread attention in the national sports media. Akermanis (Akermanis & Smart, 2010) had an extensive playing career in the AFL for more than a decade, with milestones including a Brownlow Medal and playing in three AFL premierships. In May 2010 Akermanis publicly stated that gay players ought to remain in the closet, remarking that “if they are thinking about telling the world, my advice would be forget it” (cited in Cashmore & Cleland, 2011, p. 5). Although in themselves, such comments could be considered relatively banal and insignificant, they might constitute the first “official” acknowledgement that homosexual players exist in the AFL.

The fact that these remarks were widely reported in both the print and television media implies that they were considered newsworthy and topical—had there been any current or former openly gay players in the ranks of the AFL, it is unlikely that the remarks would have been noteworthy at all (Walsh, 2010). While the comments in themselves might have been rather insignificant as the personal opinion of one player, the general reaction to them was perhaps more significant. The overall reaction to Akermanis’ views within the organisation of the AFL and the wider community in general was negative. The consensus was that homosexuality ought not to be an issue in team sport, whether at a professional or amateur level.

Such a reaction reflects that even in the arena of professional sport, the general public has become more accepting of the openly gay male. This general trend

over the past decades is evident even among those who follow sports in which a traditional and narrow definition of masculinity prevails. It would appear that homophobia has significantly diminished across nearly all levels of modern society. Researchers such as Anderson (2011a; 2013) and Adams (2011) have documented a significant decline in homophobia even within the field of amateur sport.

This trend of declining homophobia was reflected by the general reaction to Akermanis' remarks by both players and those holding official positions within the sport. The remarks received such widespread coverage that they were the topic of the next edition of the AFL's popular, weekly television programme *The Footy Show* (Newnham & Carbone, 2010). The topic was discussed seriously, calmly and rationally by the panellists. The clear consensus was that AFL clubs had policies of inclusion that extended, by implication, to openly gay males. This placed further ideological distance between the AFL and Akermanis. Also of note was the fact that this show's regular panellist, Sam Newman, did not make light of this subject in any way, given his reputation for controversial media stunts, both on this programme and in public (Newnham & Cardone, 2010).

The fact that an AFL club, the Western Bulldogs, issued an official statement distancing itself from these remarks is further evidence that, at least officially, the AFL does not condone homophobia and would accept an openly gay male player. As with previous statements on this topic, the words "inclusive" and "welcoming" were prominent ("Western Bulldogs' Statement on Akermanis," 2010).

Akermanis' views on this topic were shown to be out of touch with prevailing community attitudes and the official policies of current AFL clubs. As a result of these remarks and the reactions to them, he became a figure of derision in the media. Not only was he criticised for his unpopular views, he was mocked both in the print media and television as both ignorant and inarticulate. A particularly scathing article in the magazine *Zoo Weekly* ("Akermanis Gay-O-Meter," 2010, p. 5) not only ridiculed him but also displayed the overall irony of his stance. It featured a picture from a previous AFL match (Fig. 9) where he is pulling down the shorts of an opposing team player to reveal his underwear.



Figure 9: Zoo Weekly magazine article, the 'Akermanis Gay-O-Meter' (2010).

The illustration appeared to stress that such behaviour was permissible to heterosexual players as it had no erotic significance, whereas the same actions by an openly homosexual player would be interpreted differently. Only heterosexual players are permitted such conduct as it is based on the supposedly manly values of

aggression and competition. Overt homosexuals somehow tarnish this process. In fact, the image could also imply that Akermanis, as a professional footballer, regularly participated in on-field activities that could easily be construed as gay or homoerotic in this context. It further mocked him by implying that aspects of his appearance such as his facial hair and grooming were indicative of a gay clone ("Akermanis Gay-O-Meter," 2010).

Clearly sections of the popular media were aware of the irony and indeed hypocrisy of Akermanis' comments. The fact that many reactions of the public reported in the media were consistently negative towards both the individual and his remarks seems to have hastened his rift with his employer and the eventual loss of his positions in the media as a football commentator (C Wilson & Lane, 2010). Indeed, there was such an emphasis on his outmoded views that the broader implications of his opinions were completely overlooked by the popular media. Mocking the messenger not only dismissed Akermanis as frivolous but also the implications of what he was saying. For example, at no point did the popular press examine or even ask why there are no openly gay players in the AFL.

Whatever Akermanis' remarks revealed about his convictions, they also revealed to some degree something about the AFL establishment. In the wake of the controversy he caused, the AFL were quick to stress their non-discriminatory policies with such buzz words as "welcoming" and "inclusive" yet no one seemed prepared to answer (or even to ask) the question of why there are no openly gay players in the AFL.

Whatever his actual intent, Akermanis' remarks highlighted one of the significant but rarely acknowledged features of the AFL in relation to homosexual players. Firstly, he was confirming that they existed within the contemporary game and, more importantly, that overt homosexuals might present various "issues" for certain other players. In addition, his remarks illustrated that homosexual AFL players were effectively invisible and always had been.

In the ensuing tumult of condemnation and praise of inclusiveness, this issue was forgotten. While Akermanis and his outmoded views were the focus, the broader and more inconvenient aspects of the matter could be avoided. By dismissing him, all implications of the message could be ignored. Indeed, it appears this is exactly what

occurred. Once Akermanis was removed from his media positions and thereby seen to be dutifully punished and effectively silenced; the matter was considered rectified in the public domain (S Lane & Hanlon, 2010). The issue had become personified in the form of one errant and misguided former player. With the offender duly dealt with, there was no longer an issue for the media to pursue; the culprit and been punished and the AFL exonerated. The AFL collectively emerged as an inclusive and progressive social institution.

A further point of interest is how the media reports on AFL players and those of other codes. With the Akermanis incident duly consigned to tabloid history, various questions remain as to how the Akermanis controversy developed and its eventual denouement. Among other things, this controversy acknowledged that gay men exist, albeit surreptitiously, in the AFL. The AFL put its position on record. It basically amounted to: "I would support an AFL player coming out" (Walsh, 2012, p. 41). This showed it in a progressive and benevolent light. In fact, Akermanis' former AFL club issued a disclaimer on the very day of his controversial remarks stating that the club did not agree with him.

At the time, there was also speculation in the press that some unnamed players had been offered financial inducements to come out publicly (Akermanis, 2010). If this were the case, then it seems these players were offered an unusual courtesy by the tabloid media, not generally offered to other gay men in public life. During the same month of Akermanis' remarks, a New South Wales member of parliament and then government minister, David Campbell was exposed as gay when photographed leaving a gay sauna (Salusinszky, 2010). He gave no consent and had no control over the very public exposure of his homosexuality (Fig. 10).

NSW

Sex scandal rocks Labor

Sean Nicholls

May 21, 2010

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David Campbell resigns

NSW Minister David Campbell resigns after accusations he used a taxpayer-funded government car to visit a gay sex club.

Figure 10. State MP David Campbell outed in the media (Nicholls, 2010)

It would seem that on the topic of outing, different standards apply: to date no AFL player has ever been forcibly outed by the media. For some undeclared reason, AFL players are exempt from this particular form of media exposure. This stance reflects the popular media's ambivalent and contradictory attitude towards public outing when it comes to professional footballers. In this sense, while it publicly condemned Akermanis' comments, it tacitly condoned his covert message regarding the closet. Whatever the reasons for it, one thing is clear: it further serves to propagate the narrow concept of masculinity in high-profile team sports and helps explain why no AFL player has ever come out of the closet.

6.2.2 Jason Ball and Brock McLean.

The next time the issue of homosexual players was raised in the popular press was 2012 when Jason Ball (Fig. 11) an openly gay amateur player from country Victoria cited his frustrations in having no gay role models in his sport of choice. (Stark, 2012). While the context differed from Akermanis' comments, it again

highlighted the total absence of open gay players within the ranks of the AFL.

This incident was significant for various reasons, as Ball became the first player at any level of the game to talk openly about his homosexuality (Stark, 2013a). Furthermore, he gained substantial public support, both from his own amateur club and eventually from other AFL players.



Figure 11: Amateur AFL player Jason Ball comes out (Stark, 2012).

Ball called for a pride match as part of the official AFL season to support gay players and tackle homophobia within the sport. While the AFL hierarchy affirmed its policies of inclusion and equal opportunity and gave qualified support to the idea, it did not commit itself to such an event (Walsh, 2012). Significantly, when Ball made his sexuality public in 2012, no professional footballer publicly supported his stance on homophobia. Just as with Akermanis' comments two years earlier, Ball's actions highlighted the fact that there are no openly gay players, coaches or even umpires in the AFL and the game's star players rarely speak on the issue.

Ball's actions drew attention to the general ambivalence that pervades the AFL on the issue of homosexuality: while they support the values of inclusion and equal opportunity, they are reluctant to embrace the issue. The hierarchy struggles with how to present "its best face" in terms of gay players. Moreover, it appears that

no player, whether gay or not, wishes to become the “poster boy” of such a cause.

Five months later in February 2013, after Ball’s comments were reported in the media, he led Victoria’s annual Gay Pride March with some of his teammates from the Yarra Glen Football Club and was joined by two current, professional AFL players, Richmond’s Daniel Jackson and Carlton’s Brock McLean (Ainsworth, 2013) (Fig. 12). In addition, McLean publicly displayed a more personal interest in the issue when he revealed only a few weeks earlier that he had a gay sibling (Stark, 2013a). In the coverage of this Pride March, on both commercial and ABC television on 3 February 2013, McLean openly acknowledged homophobia in sport and that participants tended to pretend it did not exist (Ainsworth, 2013). While such actions are comparatively recent and reflect a small minority among hundreds of players, they do indicate that, like society in general, the culture of the AFL is changing—homophobia is declining, albeit very slowly in a piecemeal fashion, within the official ranks of the AFL.



Figure 12: Current AFL players show support for amateur gay player (Ainsworth, 2013).

While there appear to be no definitive statistics on the current demographics of professional AFL players, it is still possible to make a number of assumptions. For example, as a mainstream institution of Australian society, the majority of its current players live and have been raised in Australia. Since very few players pursue their professional playing careers beyond their mid-thirties, they are a comparatively

young group with the majority aged in their twenties.

6.3 Invisible and Gay

The controversies and media comment generated by Akermanis and Ball drew attention to the absence of openly gay players within the AFL. The official reaction of the AFL hierarchy and the mainstream media coverage might elucidate why gay men continue to be invisible within the AFL. In the case of Akermanis, the issue of gay players became focused around his stated views and their immediate consequences on his media career. Clearly, his comments caused the AFL some embarrassment, as they immediately distanced themselves from them (Redford-Hunt, 2010) and ultimately terminated his services (C Wilson & Lane, 2010).

Perhaps inadvertently, Akermanis drew attention to the prevailing code of silence within the AFL on the topic of homosexuality. While his views were considered outmoded and poorly articulated, they nevertheless are indicative of prevailing, often unspoken trends and attitudes within professional team sports as noted by Anderson (2005a), Pronger (2000) and Wellard (2003). While ostensibly AFL clubs, the mainstream media and the general public would decry homophobia and support policies of inclusion, the fact that there are no openly gay AFL players suggests a culture within the organisation itself that runs counter to this public stance. While public opinion has changed significantly over recent decades, the hegemonic masculinity that prevails within the AFL and team sports in general appears to have altered little (as discussed in Chapter 3).

When Ball came out in 2012 and drew attention to the fact that he had no gay role models in his chosen sport, the issue again became the focus of media attention (Stark, 2012). While the AFL hierarchy again affirmed its policies of inclusion and equal opportunity (Walsh, 2012), it did not appear motivated to take any further action to encourage players to come out such as holding a pride round of matches (Stark, 2013a).

It seems that homophobia and the absence of openly gay players within the AFL does not generate the same reaction and concern from the AFL hierarchy as do issues such as racism and, more recently, performance-enhancing drugs. Conversely, an article in the *Sunday Age* went so far as to suggest that issues such as homophobia might be beyond its brief and that the public might be expecting too much of the

AFL in this regard (S Lane, 2012; "Let's not expect the AFL to tackle problems out of its league," 2012).

Similarly, homophobia does not generate the same amount of media interest as other misdemeanours or social transgressions. For example, Collingwood president Eddie McGuire's remarks in May 2013, which were construed as racist, made the front page of *The West Australian* newspaper (O'Donoghue, 2013a). Substance abuse appears to generate still more attention in the mainstream media. For example, the alleged use of banned supplements by Essendon players early in 2013 was reported extensively in the mainstream press for several months (Lienert, 2013; O'Donoghue, 2013b; O'Donoghue & Duffield, 2013). Similarly, there was extensive publicity in the mainstream media when a former West Coast Eagles player publicly discussed his issues with substance abuse in a television documentary *Such is Life: The Troubled Times of Ben Cousins* (Goldman & Griffin, 2010). For example, this documentary was reviewed in *The West Australian* in an illustrated article that covered three pages (Adshead, 2010b), which clearly reflected the significant public interest in this issue.

On the basis of both the AFL's reaction to homophobia and subsequent media coverage as discussed above, it would seem that encouraging gay players to come out is not a high priority. Moreover, it is viewed by both the AFL and the mainstream media as a matter of individual choice rather than an aspect of the institutional culture that pervades this sporting body. In this sense, the AFL does not see itself to be responsible for the choices closeted professional gay players make. This stance implies that a gay player has the resources, such as social supports within the AFL, to be able to publicly come out and not doing so is the result of a personal choice. In the absence of any openly gay professional players, it is equally possible that such players do not feel supported in making such a decision.

The official AFL players' Code of Conduct (AFLPA, 2008) specifically mentions players' obligations (with specific subheadings) with respect to such matters as substance abuse, gambling, racial and religious vilification, and respect and responsibilities in regard to women. Player responsibilities are alluded to in the context of the "highest standards of sportsmanship and professional conduct". It elaborates that they must not engage in any activity that might cause illness or injury, which would impede their physical performance. It also mentions "criminal activity"

but only in the context that it impacts on their playing capacity. The document implies that disreputable and dishonest conduct is anything that prevents a player fulfilling his playing duties to his club and other responsibilities such as training and public appearances at formal functions. Significantly, there are no specific indictments for homophobic conduct—in fact there is no mention of homophobia or homosexuality. This code does not appear to have been updated since 2008.

6.4 Coming Out: The Absence of Professional Gay Footballers

A similar absence of professional gay players can be seen in other popular football codes in other countries. For example, only one professional footballer in British soccer has ever come out: Justin Fashanu in 1990. Hughson and Free (2011) discuss the issue of coming out in professional football in terms of the likely media reaction and the enduring aspect of homophobia in professional team sports. Hughson and Free (2011) show that the mainstream media in Britain is not free from homophobia; in fact, it is still pervasive and tends to be expressed indirectly and in subtle ways. Moreover, they illustrate that the popular media is more concerned with sensationalism and attention-seeking headlines rather than any tangible commitment to combating homophobia in the sport. This media coverage and overall view of professional team sports as a “heteronormative” space tend to discourage gay players from coming out. They state that the prevailing image presented in the mainstream media, both implicitly and explicitly, is of the male sports star as heterosexual. In this they mirror the “compulsory straightness” alluded to by researchers such as Cashmore and Cleland (2011). Hughson and Free (2011) further argue that champion male athletes acquire a status akin to war heroes in terms of national identity and patriotism, becoming symbols of national pride. Thus, the identity of such champions is generally viewed as heterosexual as it is subsumed into that of the majority.

Given this view of professional team sports as a heteronormative space, it is not surprising that gay players are reluctant to come out. Citing the near-complete absence of gay players in Britain’s most popular football code (soccer), Hughson and Free (2011) speculate on the potential conditions that might induce professional players to come out. Citing the work of gay activists, they speculate that a primary condition would be to do so collectively in order to reduce any potential isolation and victimisation (Tatchell cited in Hughson & Free, 2011).

For professional players to come out collectively, they would need information about one another's sexuality. This presupposes some form of support network, whether formal or informal. The fact that no professional British footballer has chosen to come out since Fashanu suggests that such a network is unlikely to exist. This perceived lack of official or even informal support for gay players may explain the complete absence of openly gay players in contemporary British football.

It is not merely academic research that tends to support this view of a significant lack of support for coming out. It can also be found in more popular or mainstream works. For example, in a recent *exposé* on professional football in Britain entitled *I am the Secret Footballer* (Anonymous, 2012), an unidentified professional player details various aspects of this game in a behind-the-scenes account. Although a different football code in a different country, there are parallels with AFL as a high-profile and popular team sport such as the lucrative contracts of its more successful players and their celebrity status, as well as the attention they garner from the tabloids for their exploits, both on and off the playing field.

The author discusses several aspects of professional British football including managers, professional agents, coaches and the media, and details various player misdemeanours such as illicit substance abuse and sexual indiscretions (Anonymous, 2012). He states that he has never come across any disclosures of homosexuality despite any suspicions he might have had about his peers. Since he details other sexual indiscretions (e.g. marital infidelity), it would seem that gay players (at least to his knowledge) do not feel supported or encouraged to come out. He elaborates further on this theme when discussing official measures to combat racism within British football, which has been far more extensive than efforts to tackle homophobia. This is similar to the problems outlined above regarding the AFL Code of Conduct (AFLPA, 2008).

These examples from professional British football seem to reflect the situation within the AFL in terms of the absence of openly gay players. In both sports, there appears to be a lack of consistent official support and of informal networks to induce gay players to come out. Given this situation, it is not surprising that there are currently no openly gay players in the professional ranks of either British football or the AFL.

While there is no equivalent *exposé* on the AFL, the following section speculates on aspects of AFL culture that are common to other professional codes in an attempt to elucidate factors that might preclude gay players from coming out.

6.5 Aspects of AFL Culture that Preclude Coming Out

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, it appears that conformity to hegemonic masculinity, at least in terms of heterosexuality, is persistent throughout the major football codes in Australia, particularly the AFL. While there do not appear to be any major studies into homosexuality in the professional AFL, researchers such as Cashmore and Cleland (2011) and Hughson and Free (2011) have examined the issue of gay professional footballers in the UK and the difficulties they face in coming out; including contractual and financial obligations and familial considerations.

To be admitted to the professional ranks of the AFL involves a protracted scrutiny and selection process. Hickey and Kelly (2010) show that it is a very detailed and, in some respects, rather intrusive process. For example, selectors often inquire into the social circumstances and familial background of potential players. Various features of the candidate's life are examined, such as their family of origin and their attitudes to study and employment. These researchers show that selectors are not merely interested in the athletic prowess and achievements of these young men but also how and whether they will adjust to the AFL culture and team environment. Given this scrutiny of a player's domestic and extended familial situation, any overt homosexual players would come to their attention unless they were and remained in the closet throughout this selection process.

A closeted gay player may not feel supported or feel that the AFL hierarchy considers homophobia as a priority compared to other social issues such as racism or substance abuse. In fact, it is only relatively recently (since about 2010) that the issue of homophobia has been discussed at any significant length in the mainstream media. Moreover, there is no mention of homophobia in the official player Code of Conduct (AFLPA, 2008), while racial and religious vilification and substance abuse are covered in detail.

Furthermore, a gay player would need to feel supported in any potential decision to come out. This would seem to be a prerequisite to come out publicly. In the context of British football, researchers such as Hughson and Free (2011) state that such a disclosure should be done as a collective rather than an individual act as this would tend to diminish any potential negative consequences such as isolation and victimisation on the players who chose to come out publicly. A prerequisite to any such collective coming out would need to be some form of informal or formal support network for gay players: a forum in which gay players could interact with and support one another. There does not appear to be any such support network within the AFL. When Ball came out in 2012 he drew attention to the fact that there were no positive gay role models in his chosen sport (Stark, 2012), it implied that there were no support networks for gay players within the AFL—at least none that an amateur player could access.

This presumed lack of support networks within the AFL for gay players does not necessarily imply a universally hostile environment for them. In 2013, at least two current AFL players—Jackson and McLean—marched with Ball at the head of the Victorian Gay Pride March (Ainsworth, 2013). While this appears to have been the first time AFL players have publicly supported gay pride in such a manner, it shows that there are at least some professional players who publicly reject homophobia. Such recent actions of public support are clear examples that the AFL is gradually becoming more accepting of the prospect of professional gay players.

In this context, there are two likely scenarios for the aspiring gay player: either he is openly gay and his family agree to collude in concealing the fact or he is not out to his immediate family. In the former case, the player would probably have no hesitation in coming out after his professional career. Moreover if they were in an openly gay relationship, it might be rather difficult to conceal. However, the latter is more likely the case: a gay male who conceals his sexuality from others. This may extend to all members of his immediate family and endure for a significant part of his adult life. In the pre-gay liberation era when homosexual acts was criminalised and pathologised, he would have been the norm rather than the exception.

6.5.1 Financial and contractual obligations.

In addition to being part of a professional football team, players often have financial commitments such as sponsorship and other contractual obligations. A

closeted professional player might fear significant loss if comes out. However, in the matter of the very first AFL player to come out, any such potential loss would be offset by the novelty of such an openly gay player. For example, the rights to his biography would likely compensate for any loss of sponsorship. Moreover, there is the example of former professional rugby league player Ian Roberts, who did not appear to suffer any significant financial hardship after he came out and went on to pursue a career in acting (as discussed in Chapter 3).

Furthermore, as sponsorship arrangements exist only for a finite period, a former player could come out following the cessation of such an arrangement well after retirement. However, as yet not one player has chosen to do so.

Cook (2011b) interviewed three prominent gay athletes—Olympic diver Mathew Mitcham, cyclist Michelle Ferris and speed skater Blake Skjellerup—as well as sponsors of professional athletes in Australia. This discussion showed that the issue of openly gay athletes and financial endorsements is not an “all-or-nothing” proposal. Admittedly, the athletes interviewed were from individual rather than team sports; however, it would appear that the situation is gradually changing: there seems to be more acceptance in the commercial sphere of sponsoring openly gay athletes.

Factors unique to AFL and common among other professional team sports combine to produce the complete social invisibility of gay men among its professional ranks. The nature of the masculinity it affirms appears to be a significant factor. As discussed in preceding chapters, this hegemonic masculinity is usually—or until the advent of modern gay liberation was—viewed in terms of exclusive heterosexuality.

A sign of how much the traditional view of hegemonic masculinity in terms of popular sport has altered is reflected in the controversy regarding Russian anti-gay laws and the Sochi Winter Olympics. Perhaps for the very first time at an international level, the issue of gay athletes has been linked to the issue of gay rights (Agencies, 2014). Olympic athletes, both gay and non-gay, have openly protested against these laws.

6.5.2 Conventional Marriage.

A closeted gay AFL player in a conventional marriage might be reluctant to come out fearing the stigma and adverse publicity that might attach to his family.

This may explain the failure of such a player to come out following retirement. However, in an era of same-sex couples and gay parents, this reluctance might be harder to explain. Furthermore, while young children are vulnerable to stigma, once they reach adulthood this might be not such a significant issue. This presumes that the adult children are aware of their parent's homosexuality.

6.5.2 Individual traits.

In considering the factors that preclude professional AFL players coming out of the closet, it appears there may be more than one set of individual circumstances and conditions that lead to the complete absence of openly gay players among its professional ranks. Given that each of the possible reasons for non-disclosure mentioned above can be countered, it would seem that it is a combination of factors that leads to the complete absence of openly gay men from the professional ranks of the AFL. Furthermore, there might be circumstances that distinguish AFL from other professional codes. Without access to professional gay players, it is not possible to identify them.

A more significant explanation may lie in the character traits of men who choose to remain in the closet for extended periods, particularly those who enjoy public notoriety such as popular sportsmen. Despite the many gains made by gay liberation, there are still men who conceal their homosexuality and use heterosexual marriage as a cover for their alternate sexuality. There may be many reasons for this concealment: a fear of rejection by one's peers, a need for acceptance by others, or the security of belonging to a socially valued group such as that of an elite athlete. The closeted gay man may also have internalised homophobia to such an extent that he is not able to publicly come out. In this context, his negative self-esteem might be compensated by the public acclaim of belonging to a popular institution such as AFL and its attendant material gain. In this sense, the acclaim of belonging to a popular institution is a significant compensation for an otherwise negative self-image.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed media coverage of issues and controversies pertaining to homosexual AFL players, both amateur and professional. The discussion of these issues is relatively recent – beginning in 2010. The coverage reflects that the AFL is not an overtly homophobic or anti-gay institution and that

officially, at least, there is no impediment to an openly gay player. Also discussed in this chapter was that the media coverage has tended towards the sensationalist, focusing on the messenger rather than the message as in the case of Akermanis' remarks. It also showed that the issue of gay players or homophobia receives relatively little coverage compared to other social issues or controversies. For example, both racism and substance abuse have received much more coverage in the mainstream media in recent months. Compared to these issues, homophobia is not a priority. Whether a professional AFL player feels supported enough to come out is not as important to the institution as whether he takes banned substances or is racially vilified.

The final chapter consolidates the information presented in the thesis. It presents a series of logical speculations based on this information and through a consistent analysis attempts to explain the reasons behind the absence of openly gay men from a major sporting institution of Australian society. As not all the information is consistent, these speculations will also reflect a degree of contradiction.

Chapter 7: Conclusion—Looking for the Invisible

7.1 Overview

The absence of openly gay players within the ranks of the professional AFL as a research project is akin to attempting to solve the mystery of a crime novel before reaching the final chapter. As there is no accessible public record of any professional gay player, the researcher is forced to look for relevant clues to construct logical and consistent speculations that offer some credible explanation.

Instead of analysing any observable traits of the AFL, this research speculates on the likely causes for what is not present. Generally, it is easier to examine a positive, observable phenomenon than to speculate on a negative and unobservable one. In a way, the researcher is working backwards when trying to explain the absence of a phenomenon rather than its presence.

No major institution of contemporary society such as the AFL exists within a social vacuum. Therefore, as a popular sporting institution, it is likely to be affected, to some degree, by the changes occurring in the rest of society, including reform movements such as gay liberation.

Chapter 2 of this thesis outlined some of the social changes effected by the modern gay rights movement. This movement was built on the social visibility of gay men on being “out and proud”. Indeed, it would not be possible to have such an effective, organised and vocal reform movement without men who openly identify as gay and thereby come out of the closet. The gay rights movement has been responsible for many changes including specific reforms in human rights legislation. However, there are also less tangible or less noticeable effects that have emerged with generational change over more than four decades. Significantly, the movement has altered how gay men are collectively perceived by society and, as a result, how men and masculinity are perceived.

Prior to modern gay liberation, gay men were defined by the law as criminals and by the official medical establishment as psychiatrically disturbed sexual perverts. After more than four decades, their status has improved significantly. For example,

the current, worldwide campaign for same-sex marriage reflects a greater social tolerance than in previous decades. In Australia, same-sex marriage is the official policy of both the Greens and Labor parties (Maiden, 2011; Tillett, 2013). As a result of greater numbers of gay men coming out in modern Western society, hegemonic masculinity as such has come to be questioned by researchers such as Anderson (2009), who speculate that a new masculinity is emerging.

As outlined in Chapter 3, the changes brought about by the gay rights movement are not consistent across all the major institutions of contemporary Australian society. The AFL—specifically its professional ranks—is a major institution where the openly gay man is completely absent. It appears that such a male is not “compatible” with the AFL. This absence is not a statistical accident or mere coincidence of circumstances. This thesis has shown that the hegemonic masculinity that predominates in such team sports tends to preclude the openly gay male. Researchers such as Connell (1995) and Anderson (2010) have illustrated how organised team sports is a mechanism that fosters this hegemonic masculinity. Since this form of masculinity is highly valued in contemporary society, it is propagated within sporting institutions from early on in the life cycle of males through the support of the education system.

Keddie (2003) and Bartholomaeus (2011) have shown that from an early age boys are exposed to and taught to revere the traits of hegemonic masculinity within a team sporting context—traits such as physical strength, endurance, competitiveness and aggression. Specifically, Keddie (2003) found that young boys’ investment in football culture was linked to homophobic understandings of masculinity. These studies also illustrate that the education system regularly colludes in this acquisition, both overtly and covertly: it actively encourages the characteristics associated with success in sport from an assumption that they are the natural, inherent traits of boys generally. While educators have little motivation to question this popular model of masculinity, the divisions it fosters in terms of sexism and homophobia are unlikely to be challenged. These studies reflect that the effects of hegemonic masculinity in relation to sport are covert and pervasive in the formal education system.

From an early age, boys are taught that to excel in sport as a positive trait of masculinity. Conversely, boys who do not excel in sport or avoid it altogether tend to be deemed as weak or effeminate by their peers (Keddie, 2003). One significant

aspect of this acquisition of hegemonic masculinity is that sport is associated with masculinity and heterosexuality. In this context of the early socialisation of boys and the role sport plays in their formal education, it appears that traditional stereotypes of gay men as weak and effeminate still have a marked influence.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 examined various aspects of why and how hegemonic masculinity is still dominant within the culture of the AFL and how this culture may preclude professional players from coming out. This was done in the context of contemporary and other male-dominated institutions such as the military.

Chapter 4 looked at the common aspects of masculinity in exclusively or predominantly male institutions, specifically professional team sports and the military. Both these institutions propagate the traits associated with hegemonic masculinity such as competitiveness and aggression. While the military had an official policy of excluding openly gay men, professional football codes never had such policies. The rescinding of such a policy by official government action reflected a degree of responsiveness to social change. Conversely, where there is no such policy, it is more difficult to discern such change.

Chapter 5 examined how representations of some popular AFL players in the mainstream media propagate aspects of hegemonic masculinity. It focused on the reporting of their personal indiscretions and misdemeanours. It found that the sexual indiscretions are always those of a heterosexual nature: the mainstream media does not report on homosexual indiscretions and it has never actually outed a player despite the fact that it has outed men in other areas of public life such as politicians.

Chapter 6 summarised relatively recent coverage in the mainstream media of the prospect of openly gay players in the AFL. It covered former players such as Jason Akermanis and aspiring players such as Jason Ball. It disclosed the AFL's rather ambivalent stance to the prospect of an openly gay player. On the one hand, the AFL hierarchy makes statements of openness and inclusion; on the other hand, it is reluctant to take more overt measures to encourage players to come out.

7.2 Further Research

The research outlined in this thesis suggests that this climate of non-disclosure stems from the particular culture within the institution rather than factors external to it in contemporary Australian society; it has already been noted that the

modern gay rights movement has led to significant gains not only in the acceptance of gay males but also in their increased visibility across a range of contemporary social institutions. It seems incongruous that a major institution of Australian society and one of the country's most popular football codes has never had one of its professional players acknowledge his homosexuality.

Furthermore, the mainstream media has never outed any professional player within the AFL. Since scandal and sensationalism are staples of the tabloid media, it seems unusual that there as yet has never been such an *exposé* on a professional AFL player. Since tabloid journalists do not shy away from exposing the personal peccadilloes—such as sexual infidelity, promiscuity or illicit substance abuse—of various public figures, it seems odd that the issue of homosexuality has never been linked to any current or former AFL player in the mainstream media. In an era when the privacy of celebrities such as popular footballers is often violated by tabloid journalism for the sake of a “good story”, this absence seems rather anomalous.

In this context, further research into the role and practices of the mainstream media might shed some light on the comparative absence of material concerning homosexuality and the professional ranks of the AFL. If there are no “official” policies in this regard, it might be difficult to establish any clear parameters on the reporting (or the non-reporting) of this topic. At the very least, such research could identify trends and long-standing patterns of reporting on celebrity footballers.

7.3 Inconclusive Conclusions

It would appear that something associated with the public persona of an AFL player negates being open about one's homosexuality. This “something” is unlikely to be one specific, tangible and quantifiable entity. On a broader level, professional football intersects with a number of other institutions such as the media, as well as social constructs of masculinity. On the micro level, an individual player faces a range of personal issues including familial commitments and financial sponsorship. These will vary from player to player. Given such diversity of individual circumstances alone, there cannot be one specific condition, applicable to all players in all contexts, which prevents openness concerning an alternate sexuality.

Apart from the specifics of the AFL, there is the basic fact of belonging to a team. Being part of any sports team presupposes a degree of conformity in order to

attain the goals of that team. While the individual is actively part of a team, part of their identity is subordinated to that of the team. This is symbolised by the wearing of the team colours or uniform. For those who are not interested participants, it is easily forgotten how sport can become a signifier of one's identity. For example, Anderson (2010) found that the young athletes he surveyed did not tend to describe themselves by their racial or ethnic origin or any other signifier but by the college sport they practised.

Within the AFL, as within all professional sporting bodies, there is a hierarchy as well as a series of ever larger organisational groupings. A particular team is part of a club comprising players and coaching and support staff. The club itself is located within the larger grouping of the AFL itself, which comprises all the team clubs, its executive hierarchy, media spokespersons and commentators. These layers of ever larger groups within professional football reinforce the individual player's public identity as an AFL team athlete. With this public and professional sporting identity come proscribed codes of conduct and behaviour. As with other professional bodies, AFL players have a code of conduct that extends beyond their public activities on the playing field to their behaviour and actions in more private aspects of their lives (AFLPA, 2008). The fact that this code makes no mention of homosexuality or homophobia is consistent with the complete absence of openly gay men within the professional AFL.

Amateur football players such as Jason Ball appear to be a lone voice in the call for gay AFL players to come out and thus act as role models for aspiring gay players such as himself. Given the changes wrought by gay liberation over the past four decades, it difficult to understand why no former professional AFL player has ever come out. While this thesis has examined a number of features pertaining to both the AFL and to contemporary society in general, these features may not be a definitive or complete explanation of the specific issue under examination.

In terms of the AFL itself, there appears to be a lack of support at many levels to encourage gay players to come out. For example, the executive hierarchy appears generally reluctant to be seen taking an active and more public role. While they make public statements about the virtues of acceptance and policies of inclusion, they do not display the same enthusiasm as with other social issues. For example, the hierarchy has gone to great lengths to combat racial vilification and illicit substance

abuse in the AFL, but issues such as homophobia do not appear to be a priority.

Similarly, at the grass-roots level, there does not appear to be any informal support network for gay players. While it appears contemporary players are less homophobic than their predecessors and there is no evidence that they are any more so than any other group, this does not translate into any noticeable support network for gay players. The fact that at least two prominent AFL players (McLean and Jackson) marched in Victoria's Gay Pride March in 2013 signifies the greater acceptance of gay men by at least some professional players. Despite such affirmative statements, their gay counterparts still remain silent and hidden.

This study has found that being a member of the professional AFL generally results in a high degree of scrutiny from the mainstream media: generally, the more popular and successful the individual player, the greater this scrutiny. However, not all of its members are household names and not all indulge in sexual misdemeanours that attract media attention.

Apart from any potential media attention, there is the continual scrutiny of the AFL itself, beginning with the recruitment process by its agents. This entails an assessment of a potential player's individual circumstances, which may extend to his domestic and work situation. Once they are contracted to the AFL, much of their time is spent in the company of their peers, not only in training and playing matches but also in other promotional activities including media appearances. Under these circumstances, it would not be possible for a professional AFL player to have an openly gay relationship and not have it come to the attention of his peers and mentors unless he (and his partner) took decisive steps to conceal it.

In the absence of any testimony from any gay current or former professional players, this thesis can only offer an incomplete explanation. Clearly certain aspects specific to contemporary AFL culture preclude the gay player from coming out. Until and unless gay AFL players are willing to speak publicly about their homosexuality, there can be no definitive statement on why it is taking so long for them to come out of the closet. Without the testimony of gay professional players, there can only be speculation as to the likely causes for this continuing trend of non-disclosure.

In the absence of openly gay players, one avenue of investigation might entail a researcher masquerading as a professional—and, if possible, closeted—player to

begin to uncover a more complete explanation as to why a professional gay AFL player chooses to remain in the closet. Clearly, this would hardly be feasible or credible. However bizarre and unethical it may sound, it does reflect how difficult it is to conduct research when one cannot access the subjects directly or even indirectly. It also illustrates how frustrating such an endeavour can be.

This silence is all the more unusual in that gay men have come out from the other major football codes in this country (rugby league) and other nations such as Britain (soccer and rugby) and the US (gridiron). AFL remains one of the few major football codes in which no current or former player has ever chosen to come out.

There is no evidence to suggest that professional AFL players are any more or any less homophobic than Australian society in general. Like the rest of this society, many of them are likely to have openly gay acquaintances, friends and even relatives. Moreover, in recent years, a few players (such as McLean and Jackson mentioned in Chapter 6) have shown support for gay players coming out through more public acts of support. While such acts are relatively rare and recent, they are positive steps in publicly acknowledging homophobia in professional sport. Yet these acts are not enough to entice professional players to come out.

While the gay rights movement has led to changes in how masculinity is perceived, it seems hegemonic masculinity still dominates the professional AFL. As discussed in Chapter 3, this pattern of masculinity is the indirect result of the social changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution and organised team sports are one means whereby this masculinity is propagated across successive generations of males. Until the advent of gay liberation, this masculinity was publicly synonymous with heterosexuality. Chapter 5 illustrated how the mainstream media tends to promote this allegedly universal heterosexuality whenever reporting on players' private lives, especially their sexual indiscretions.

A recent newspaper article (Howard & Wright, 2014) discusses the potential coming out of gay AFL players and cites many salient aspects of this issue. These include: the lack of change regarding homophobia and gay visibility within the ranks of the AFL compared with the rest of Australian society; the disparity between official policy statements by the AFL hierarchy and actual grass-roots support for gay players; and the overall, often rather obsessive, concern with secrecy by gay

players. Significantly, it ends with a relevant point of terminology, namely the continued use by the media and the AFL of the term WAGs. As a gender-specific term, this acronym automatically precludes the masculine. Its continued use enforces in the public mind that the partners of AFL players are, without exception, female. While only one specific term, it is part of the extensive culture and long history of the AFL which views professional players as exclusively heterosexual.

Although the prospect of openly gay players is now being discussed in the mainstream media, it receives little attention compared to other issues in the AFL such as racism and substance abuse. Encouraging gay players to come out does not appear to be a priority for the AFL. Similarly, the mainstream media shows a marked interest in reporting the heterosexual indiscretions of popular players. Given this, it is not surprising that professional gay players remain unknown to the general public.

Prior to commencing this study, I contacted the editor of *DNA*, a major Australian gay publication in relation to an article he had published on AFL players. Given the topic of this research and nature of the reply, it seems appropriate to quote it in full:

It's raw nerve territory.

In October last year we did a story on why AFL players can't come out. At the end we asked to hear from anyone with AFL experience who wanted to talk to us on the issue. Not surprisingly, we didn't hear from any players or ex-players. We did, however, hear from their friends! All their letters were very discrete and there's no way we could identity anyone from them, but they said things like, "my friend is an AFL player and he and his boyfriend have been together x months/years and they have to be very careful" etc.

Other letters basically said "I had sex with so-and-so at a beat".

Cheers A. (A. Creagh, personal communication, 31 July 2006)

The email from the *DNA* editor while brief reveals parallels with this study regarding the absence of openly gay players: no contact from any AFL players, unease at public disclosure, concealment of homosexual liaisons, and speculation that cannot be verified in any definitive manner. As the editor succinctly puts it, the prospect of an openly gay professional AFL player regrettably still remains "raw nerve territory".

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